

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE ended on a particular day, but its beginnings are shrouded in myth.

On 29 October 1923 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was declared president of the Turkish Republic, a state whose legitimacy was based on popular sovereignty within finite, internationally-recognized frontiers. Turkish republicans had already demoted the Ottoman Sultan – on 1 November 1922 – so that he retained only his religious role as caliph, and on 3 March 1924 they abolished that office too, thereby abandoning altogether the notion that the state they were creating owed its existence to dynastic politics or to divine right.

Between the 15th and the 20th of October 1927 Mustafa Kemal set out in a lengthy address to parliament – so famous that it is known in Turkish simply as ‘The Speech’ – the reasons his generation had rejected the nation’s stale and unprofitable Ottoman past. His first years in power were dedicated to a series of reforms, which he called revolutions, designed to oblige the Turkish people to abandon their imperial heritage, escape the tyranny of clerics, and embrace the modern world.

It is only more recently that Turks have been able to see their own history as something other than the story of the rise and terrible decline of an Islamic empire that at its height in the sixteenth century might have rivalled the might of ancient Rome, but that owing to some inherent flaw failed to keep pace with the Christian West. For centuries Ottoman military might intimidated the armies not just of Europe but of Iran and other Muslim states; Ottoman architects built the great mosques which dominate the skylines of Istanbul and provincial cities; the empire’s legal system continued to juggle the ethnic complexities of the Balkans and the Middle East. To discover exactly how the Ottomans managed to finance and administer an empire of this scale, modern historians of an independent mind began to decipher the architects’ account books and to examine the legal records; a new generation of scholars began to read between the lines of chronicles commissioned by victorious sultans, to see how the history of empire was not simply the history of its ruling family; and, perhaps most importantly, they began to look critically at the histories written – sometimes with all the sophistication

of western scholarship - in territories that had once been under Ottoman rule, and discovered that they were partial and incomplete because, seeing through a glass darkly, their authors presented national myth as historical fact and made assumptions about the nature of the Ottoman Empire without listening to the Ottoman voice.

So by the time the Turkish Republic celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of its creation in 1998, it had the confidence to plan festivities on the eve of the second millennium to commemorate the founding 700 years earlier of the Ottoman Empire. But why should 1299 CE be considered the founding date of the empire? - there were no famous battles, no declarations of independence or storming of a bastille. The simplest explanations are often the most convincing: that year corresponds to the years 699-700 in the Islamic calendar.* By rare mathematical coincidence, the centuries turned at the same time in both the Christian and Islamic calendars. What more auspicious year to mark the founding of an empire that spanned Europe and the Middle East?

The early Ottomans, struggling to plant their authority, were less concerned with the date of the founding of their state than with the vision that underpinned their right to rule. To them, empire began quite literally with a dream. One night, the first sultan, Osman, was sleeping in the house of a holy man called Edebalı when:

He saw that a moon arose from the holy man's breast and came to sink in his own breast. A tree then sprouted from his navel and its shade compassed the world. Beneath this shade there were mountains, and streams flowed forth from the foot of each mountain. Some people drank from these running waters, others watered gardens, while yet others caused fountains to flow. When Osman awoke he told the story to the holy man, who said 'Osman, my son, congratulations, for God has given the imperial office to you and your descendants and my daughter Malhun shall be your wife'.¹

First communicated in this form in the later fifteenth century, a century and a half after Osman's death in about 1323, this dream became one of the most resilient founding myths of the empire, conjuring up a sense of temporal and divine authority and justifying the visible success of Osman and his descendants at the expense of their competitors for territory and power in the Balkans, Anatolia, and beyond.

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* The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar of some 354 days; each month begins when a new moon is first sighted. Day one of this calendar is 15 or 16 July 622 CE, the first day of the lunar year in which the Prophet Muhammad journeyed from Mecca to Medina after leaving the support of his clan in a leadership struggle.

No one could have predicted the achievements of the Ottomans over the succeeding centuries. Around 1300 they were only one of many Turcoman, or Turkish, tribal groups of Central Asian origin vying for control in Anatolia – the land between the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Aegean. This had been part of the Eastern Roman Empire, which evolved into the Byzantine Empire following the split between East and West. Constantine the Great, after he came to power in 324 CE, had founded his new imperial capital, Constantinople, on the Bosphorus, and the city had continued as capital of the eastern empire. Byzantium at its height had included the Balkans and extended east across Anatolia into modern Syria and beyond, but never recovered from the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the knights of the Fourth Crusade, nor from the ensuing Latin occupation of the city between 1204 and 1261. By the early fourteenth century the empire was reduced to Constantinople itself, Thrace, Macedonia and much of modern Greece, and a few fortresses and seaports in western Anatolia.

Turcoman tribes had been bold raiders on the eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire for centuries, long before the Ottomans came to prominence. Most successful of the earlier wave of Turcomans were the Seljuk Turks, who had gradually moved westward from Central Asia as part of a prolonged migration of pastoralist nomads into the Middle East and Anatolia at a time when Byzantium was weakened by internal disputes far away in Constantinople. The Seljuk Turks met with little opposition and in 1071, under their sultan Alp Arslan, they defeated a Byzantine army commanded by Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes at the battle of Malazgirt (Manzikert), north of Lake Van in eastern Anatolia, opening the way for the Turcoman migrants to move westwards practically unhindered.

Islam arrived in predominantly Christian Anatolia with the Seljuk Turks; individuals of Turcoman stock had embraced Islam from the ninth century when they came into contact – often as mercenaries – with the Muslim dynasties of the Arab heartlands; mass conversion of Turks in Central Asia was only about a century old, however. Their migration into Anatolia was a momentous event. Under Alp Arslan's successors the Seljuks established themselves in Anatolia, making their base not far from Constantinople, at İznik (Nicaea), until the capture of that city by the soldiers of the First Crusade in 1097 forced them to withdraw to Konya (Iconium), in central Anatolia. At around the same time the Danishmendid emirate, initially more powerful than the Seljuks, controlled a wide swathe of territory across north and central Anatolia; in the north-east, the Saltukids ruled their lands from Erzurum and the Mengucheks from Erzincan; and in the south-east were the Artukids of Diyarbakır (Amid). The Anatolia into which these Turcomans

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moved was ethnically and culturally mixed, with long-established Kurdish, Arab, Greek, Armenian and Jewish populations in addition to the Muslim Turcomans. Byzantium lay to the west, and in Cilicia and northern Syria were the Armenian and Crusader states, bordered to the south by the Muslim Mamluk state with its capital at Cairo. Over the course of the next century the Seljuks absorbed the territories of their weaker Turcoman neighbours, and in 1176 their sultan Kilijarslan II routed the army of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Comnenus at the site known as Myriocephalum, to the north of Lake Eğirdir in south-west Anatolia. No longer confined to the interior of the Anatolian plateau, the Turcomans began expanding towards the coasts, gaining access to the trade routes of the surrounding seas.

The early thirteenth century was the heyday of the Seljuks of Rum as they called themselves (the geographic marker 'Rum' signified the lands of 'Eastern Rome', the Byzantine Empire) in distinction to the Great Seljuk Empire in Iran and Iraq. Stable relations between the Byzantines and the Seljuks of Rum allowed the latter to concentrate on securing their eastern borders, but this equilibrium was shattered when another wave of invaders swept in from the east: the Mongols, led by the descendants of the fearsome conqueror Genghis Khan, who sacked the lands of the various successor states of the Great Seljuk Empire that lay in their path. As the Seljuk victory at Malazgirt in 1071 had hastened the collapse of Byzantine rule in Anatolia, so a Mongol victory over a Seljuk army in 1243 at Köseadağ, near Sivas in north-central Anatolia, spelled the end of independence for the Seljuks of Rum. Their once-powerful sultan in Konya now became a tribute-paying vassal of the Mongol khan whose seat was far away at Karakorum in inner Asia. The subsequent years were turbulent as the sons of the last independent sultan Kay-Khusraw II disputed their patrimony, supported by various Turcoman and Mongol factions. Although during the last quarter of the century the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty imposed direct administration, Ilkhanid control in Anatolia was never very strong for they, like the Seljuks, were locked in internecine struggle. The Turcomans of Anatolia resisted the Ilkhanids, and the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria made inroads into the Ilkhanid domains from the south. But the Ilkhanids were more concerned with securing the profits to be earned from customs dues on the valuable trade between India and Europe, which passed along the routes through north-east Anatolia, and all but abandoned their 'far west' to the Turcoman marcher-lords on the north-western fringes of the former Seljuk lands.¹

By the early years of the fourteenth century Anatolia had become home to a new generation of Muslim Turcoman emirates. They often formed strategic alliances, but inevitably came into conflict as each developed its own distinct economic and political goals. In the south around Antalya

(Adalia) was the emirate of Teke, in south-west Anatolia was Menteşe, with Aydın to its north; the inland emirate of Hamid centred on Isparta, Saruhan had Manisa as its capital and northwards towards the Dardanelles by Karesi. Germiyan's capital was Kütahya, while north-central Anatolia was the territory of the house of İsfendiyar. The emirate of Karaman occupied south-central Anatolia with its capital at first deep in the Taurus mountains at Ermenek, then at Karaman and finally at the former Seljuk seat of Konya. By mid-fourteenth century, Cilicia was home to the emirates of the Ramazanoğulları, centred in Adana, and the neighbouring Dulkadiroğulları, based to the north-east at Elbistan. In north-west Anatolia, bordering what remained of Byzantium, was the emirate of Osman, chief of the Osmanlı – known to us as the Ottomans.

We first hear of the Ottomans around 1300 when, so a contemporary Byzantine historian tells us, there occurred in 1301 the first military encounter between a Byzantine force and troops led by a man called Osman. This battle – the battle of Bapheus – was fought not far from Constantinople, on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmara: the Byzantine forces were routed.³ Many years were to elapse, however, before the power of the Ottomans could be said to rival that of the Byzantines and many myths would arise to explain the origins of a dynasty that seemed to have sprung from nowhere.

Why did the family of Osman come to dominate its neighbours and, over the succeeding centuries, how did the Ottoman emirate, only one among many in the borderlands between Byzantine and Seljuk–İlkhanid territory, become the sole inheritor of both these states and develop into a great and long-lived empire expanding into three continents? These questions continue to fascinate historians – and to elude conclusive answer. One reason is that the history of medieval Anatolia is still rather little known. Another is that contemporary annalists of the settled states of the region – Seljuk, Armenian, Byzantine, Mamluk and Latin – were preoccupied with their own fate: details of those against whom they fought or with whom they concluded treaties enter their accounts only fortuitously. The traditions of the Anatolian Turcomans were oral and it was only once most of their rivals had been erased from the map that the Ottomans wrote down the story of their origins, emphasizing their own history at the expense of that of long-gone challengers and their doomed endeavours to found permanent states.

There are further questions to be considered. Was the Ottoman emirate motivated above all by commitment to 'holy war'⁴ (*jihād*) – the struggle against non-Muslims that was a canonical obligation upon all believers? For Muslims the world was notionally divided into the 'abode of Islam', where

Islam prevailed, and the 'abode of war', the infidel lands that must one day accept Islam – and 'holy war' was the means to bring this about. 'Holy war' had, after all, motivated the Muslim community in its early years as the new faith sought to expand and, like the proclamation of a Christian crusade, had provided inspiration to fighters down the ages. Or was it the fluid character of frontier society at this time which enabled the Ottoman emirate to gain control over extensive territories? Was the Ottoman emirate's ability to win out over rival dynasties and states due to a favourable strategic location in the march-lands of the poorly-defended Byzantine Empire, or was Ottoman expansion a consequence of political acumen and good luck? Modern historians attempt to sift historical fact from the myths contained in the later stories in which Ottoman chroniclers accounted for the origin of the dynasty, with the help of clues contained in contemporary inscriptions, coins, documents and epic poems, as well as in works in languages other than Turkish. Wherever the answers to questions about Ottoman success may lie, the struggle of the Ottomans against their Anatolian neighbours was hard fought over almost two centuries.

The geographical and climatic features of the Anatolian land mass which was home to the Turcoman emirates played a significant role in shaping their history and in the success or failure of their efforts at carving out territorial enclaves. Most of Anatolia is high, forming an elevated central plateau ringed, except in the west, by mountains rising to 4,000 metres. The terrain is gentle in the west, where the foothills of the plateau fall to the Aegean and the Sea of Marmara leaving a wide, fertile coastal plain. In the south-east the mountains give way to the deserts of Iran, Iraq and Syria. In the north and south the coastal strip is narrow and deep valleys penetrate the mountains between steep, rugged peaks. The steppe grasslands of the plateau provide rich grazing for flocks and herds but experience extremes of climate: Turcoman pastoralists – like many Anatolian husbandmen today – moved their animals to high pastures for the summer months. They traded with the settled agriculturists of the western lowlands and the coastal fringes, where soils are more productive and the climate less severe; the people of the coastal lands in turn looked to the sea for their livelihood. Thus were goods exchanged and alliances established.

The Ottomans were not the first of the post-Mongol wave of Muslim Turcoman dynasties to appear in the historical record. We hear of the Germiyan house in 1239–40,⁵ well before Osman's battle against the Byzantines in 1301, while the Karamanids, named after one Karaman Bey, first appear in 1256.⁶ As they began to claim permanent lands, these emerging

dynasties sought to make themselves visible in new ways, for instance by building monuments to impress would-be supporters. This, a practice of settled folk, not of nomadic pastoralists or subsistent agriculturists, can be seen as indicating the ambitions of former nomads to found a sedentary state. Evidence for the building activity of the Turcoman dynasties survives in dated inscriptions: from the mosque of the minor dynasty of Eşrefoğulları at Beyşehir in the lake district of south-west Anatolia of the year 696 of the Islamic calendar (1296–7 CE),⁷ and from the now-demolished Kızıl Bey mosque in Ankara where the pulpit was repaired by the chiefs of Germiyan in 699 (1298–9).⁸ The Great mosque built by the Karamanid leader Mahmud Bey in Ermenek dates, according to its inscription and foundation deed, from 702 (1302–3).⁹ The earliest dated Ottoman structure of which we have record is the Hacı Özbek mosque in İznik where the foundation inscription is dated 734 (1333–4).¹⁰

Ottoman tradition recounts that a tribal chief called Ertuğrul settled in north-west Anatolia in the marcher-lands between the Seljuk–Ilkhanid and Byzantine Empires, and that the Seljuk sultan at Konya awarded him lands around the small settlement of Söğüt, north-west of modern Eskişehir (Dorylaeum), with the right to summer pastures for his flocks in the high-lands south-west of Söğüt. If the only artefact which has come down to us from the time of Osman – an undated coin – is genuine, it suggests that Ertuğrul was an historical personage, for it bears the legend ‘Minted by Osman son of Ertuğrul’.¹¹ And since the minting of coins was a prerogative accorded in Islamic practice – as in western – only to a sovereign, it indicates Osman’s pretensions to be a princely ruler rather than a mere tribal chief, demonstrating that he had accumulated sufficient authority to challenge Ilkhanid claims to suzerainty over him and his people: the Turcoman emirates did not mint coins in the names of their own emirs while they remained under the nominal suzerainty of the Ilkhanids. The oldest surviving dated Ottoman coin is from 1326–7, however, after Osman’s death, and some see this as the earliest the Ottoman state can be considered to have been independent of the Ilkhanids.¹²

The Ottomans were fortunate in their geography. Osman’s lands were close to Constantinople, bringing him into contact with the governors of the Byzantine towns in north-west Anatolia, with whom he competed for influence as well as for pasture to satisfy the flocks of his followers. This proximity to Constantinople offered the promise of great rewards should that city fall, but also put the Ottomans under pressure from the Byzantine army as it sought to protect what remained of its beleaguered territory. Osman’s earliest advances against Byzantium seem to have been concentrated against small settlements in the countryside rather than against the

towns. It may be that the towns were difficult to capture while the countryside offered resources which were of greater value to him and his men. The representation of this area by a contemporary Byzantine historian as prosperous, populous and well-defended is borne out by archaeological evidence.¹³ Even before his first datable victory over Byzantine forces in 1301, Osman seems to have assumed control of lands lying between his father's pastures around Söğüt and İznik although he failed, despite a lengthy siege between 1299 and 1301, to take İznik itself.¹⁴

After his victory over Byzantine forces in 1301, Osman was impossible to ignore. The Byzantine emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus thought to make a radical alliance against the growing threat he represented by offering one of the princesses of his family in marriage to Osman's nominal overlord, the Ilkhanid khan Ghazan (whose seat was at Tabriz in north-west Iran) and then, when Ghazan died, to his brother. But the anticipated reciprocal help in men and materials was not forthcoming and in 1303-4 Andronicus employed the Spanish adventurers of the crusading Catalan Grand Company to protect his domains from further Ottoman advance. Like so many mercenary groups, the Catalans turned to raiding on their own account,¹⁵ calling upon Turcoman fighters – though not necessarily those under Osman's control – to join them in pursuit of their own objectives across the Dardanelles Straits in the Balkans. Only an alliance between Byzantium and the kingdom of Serbia¹⁶ checked this Turcoman-Catalan advance.

The arrival of the Turcomans in Anatolia disturbed the equilibrium of the older states. The administrative hand of the once-great Byzantine and Seljuk-Ilkhanid Empires did not reach with any authority into the region of uncertainty lying between them. But it was not exclusively warriors who inhabited these marches. The opportunities they offered undoubtedly attracted adventurers, but also people who followed the frontier simply because they had nowhere else to go. The milieu of these frontier lands where the Ottoman state had its beginnings has been described as:

... criss-crossed by overlapping networks of nomads and seminomads, raiders, volunteers on their way to join military adventurers, slaves of various backgrounds, wandering dervishes, monks and churchmen trying to keep in touch with their flock, displaced peasants and townspeople seeking refuge, disquieted souls seeking cure and consolation at sacred sites, Muslim schoolmen seeking patronage, and the inevitable risk-driven merchants of late medieval Eurasia.¹⁷

The presence of dervishes, or Muslim holy men, was one of the most striking features of the marches. Like Christian monks, some wandered the

countryside while others lived in communities of their adherents and their deeds and piety were recounted in epics and hagiographies which formed part of a long oral tradition. The links of the first Ottoman rulers with dervishes are attested to by the earliest extant document of the Ottoman state, the grant in 1324 by Osman's son Orhan of land east of İznik for a dervish lodge.¹⁸ Such lodges, like the tombs of Christian saints, formed a nucleus which attracted settlement into new areas and were an inexpensive means of securing the loyalty of the common people; dervish lodges symbolized the popular expressions of Islam which flourished in Anatolia alongside the Sunni Islam of Seljuk imperial culture. Osman may not himself have been well versed in the ways of Sunni Islam, but Orhan adopted its forms for the foundations of his state: theological colleges were built during his lifetime¹⁹ to promote the learned form of religion to which he aspired, and the language and style of the 1324 land-grant document show that his administrators were thoroughly familiar with classical Islamic chancery practice.²⁰ The Ottoman sultans who followed Orhan were invariably affiliated to one of the dervish orders: coexistence and compromise between different manifestations of religious belief and practice is one of the abiding themes of Ottoman history.

Many dervish lodges were founded in north-west Anatolia. But the fluid conditions of the marches attracted the restless energies of dervishes of a non-contemplative bent, and after the mid-fourteenth century, when the Ottomans began to colonize the Balkans, they played a particularly significant role. Dervishes carried Turco-Islamic culture with them as they fought alongside the warriors of the marches, urging them on, to be rewarded with grants of vacant land or lands won from the fleeing population.²¹ The variety of dervish orders is as bewildering as the history of their formation and re-formation. Among the best-known is the Bektāṣi order, originally a minor sect, which later came to prominence in its connection with the sultan's elite infantry troops, the janissaries.

The devotional practices of mosque-goer and dervish could be accommodated side by side in one building, and many mosques today associated with Sunni Islamic observance once had a wider function, as a refuge for dervishes as well as congregational prayer-hall. Indeed, the mosques built in Bursa by the second Ottoman sultan Orhan and his son and successor Murad are referred to in their endowment deeds as dervish lodges.²² The earliest surviving Ottoman structure in Europe, the public kitchen of Gazi Evrenos Bey in Komotini in present-day Greek Thrace, was built, like very many other similar establishments of the time, with small domed rooms to the side where dervishes could gather.²³

Orhan's land-grant of 1324 shows that Islam was a component of the

public identity of the chiefs of the Ottoman emirate from the start, for in an indisputably Islamic formulation he designates himself 'Champion of the Faith', while his late father, Osman, is styled 'Glory of the Faith'.²⁴ No document survives to tell us how Osman referred to himself, but already in the later thirteenth century the rulers of some other western Anatolian emirates had adopted Islamic epithets for themselves – 'Victor of the Faith' or 'Sword of the Faith', for instance.²⁵ The first Turcoman chief of this period to identify himself as a 'Warrior for the Faith', a *gāzī*, was of the house of Aydın in an inscription recording the construction in 1312 of a mosque in Birgi in western Anatolia. By the 1330s, both the emir of Menteşe and Orhan himself styled themselves 'Sultan of the Gazis' in inscriptions.²⁶

The term *gāzī*, denoting one who undertakes *gazā*, meaning 'war for the faith', or 'war against infidels', or 'holy war' (*gazā* may be considered almost a synonym for *jihād*), had been accorded to Muslim fighters in Seljuk times and before, but did not, in the early fourteenth century, have a confrontational, anti-Christian connotation. The term was widely used by the Ottomans, and when their chronicles and poems honoured Osman and his cohorts as *gāzīs* the word meant 'warrior' or 'raider', but with no more religious injunction than was inherent in the incumbent duty of every Muslim to fight against infidels.²⁷ Fortuitously, the Ottoman emirate bordered a Christian state, but there are no grounds for asserting that it was unique among its neighbouring emirates in embracing the ideology of 'holy war', nor does embrace of the ideology of 'holy war' provide sufficient account for its achievements. A recent reconsideration of the widely-accepted view that the *raison d'être* of the Ottoman emirate was the pursuit of 'holy war' has concluded that it was, rather, a 'predatory confederacy' comprising Muslim and Christian warriors alike, whose goal was 'booty, plunder and slaves, no matter the rhetoric used by its rulers'.²⁸ In this confederacy, the hypothesis continues, Turcoman fighters were in the minority: the rapid pace of conquest required willing and indiscriminate acceptance of large numbers of Christians into the Ottoman fold to meet the shortage of manpower available to create and administer the fledgling state.²⁹

The religion of the early Ottoman Muslims was not exclusive: oral traditions which sang the deeds of the heroes of the marches recorded not only that co-operation between Muslim fighters and Byzantine Christians was frequent, but that intermarriage was not uncommon.³⁰ That the Christian population of the north-west Anatolian marches continued to practise their religion freely is attested to in the letters of Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, who travelled through the area in 1354 as captive of the

Ottomans.³¹ Eminent Byzantines, moreover, found employment at the Ottoman court, both in Orhan's time and into the early sixteenth century.³² Later Ottoman chroniclers, writing in a period of prolonged warfare with the Christian states of the Balkans and beyond, emphasized a religious inspiration for the early conquests of the dynasty, representing the Turcoman frontiersmen as motivated solely by a desire to spread Islam. Writing at a time when the political environment was quite different, an imperial and theocratic state of which Sunni Islam was the official religion, they attributed militant piety to these frontiersmen: it seemed appropriate to assert that it had always been thus, that the state had been created by the tireless efforts of Muslim warriors struggling against their supposed antithesis, the Christian kingdoms of Byzantium and Europe. Modern historians have too often been willing accomplices in accepting the chroniclers' version of the Ottoman past.

By the time the story of the beginnings of the Ottoman Empire came to be written down, they were a distant memory. The early years of dynasties that subsequently achieve spectacular success are often shrouded in mystery, and later traditions greatly embellish meagre truths in an attempt to provide legitimacy. Osman was described in his own time as one of the most energetic of the Turcoman chiefs threatening Byzantium, and although he failed to take İznik, his siege of this important city and his military success over a Byzantine army in 1301 must have won him prestige and renown, encouraging many warriors to throw in their lot with him and his men. However, changing times demanded legitimization of Ottoman claims both to territory and to pre-eminence over the other Turcoman dynasties of Anatolia, and it became necessary that the personal fame won by Osman in his lifetime be bolstered with more compelling grounds for Ottoman supremacy.

Many challenged Ottoman power over the centuries and it was vital that the dynasty demonstrate its rule as the natural order of things. The legend of Osman's dream proved inadequate to neutralize all challenges, however, and a more tangible legacy was needed to address the place of the nascent Ottoman state in the political history of the region. By the late fifteenth century popular epic was claiming that Osman's father Ertuğrul had been granted his land near Söğüt by the Seljuk sultan of Rum himself, a claim bolstered by a story that the Seljuk sultan had presented Osman with insignia of office – a horsetail standard, a drum and a robe of honour – as marks of his legitimacy as heir to the Seljuks. A century later still, in 1575, an Ottoman chancellor forged documents purporting to be a record of the presentation of these insignia.³³ Such stories addressed the question

of the Ottoman right to inherit the Seljuk mantle, but Ottoman sovereignty also called for a nobler lineage than that of its rivals. From the early fifteenth century, then, in the face of competing states – the Timurids, and the Akkoyunlu ('White Sheep') Turcoman tribal confederation which had moved west after the wave of migration which brought Osman's clan – the Ottomans were furnished with Central Asian descent from the Turkic Qghuz tribe and their illustrious ancestor the Prophet Noah, who was said to have given the East to his son Japheth.³⁴ There are hints in texts that have come down to us that Osman's family had a less than romantic past: that he was, in fact, a simple peasant. Another tradition describes his forebears as Arabs of the Hijaz, indication, perhaps, that the Ottomans at one time thought such a fictive genealogy would best assert their legitimacy. This claim disappeared early but the dream legend, by contrast, was repeated down the ages, even until the later years of the very Ottoman Empire had portended.

Beyond the likelihood that the first Ottoman sultan was a historical figure, a Turcoman Muslim marcher-lord of the Byzantine frontier in north-west Anatolia whose father may have been called Ertuğrul, there is little other biographical information about Osman. But his dream incidentally provides one more detail which is corroborated by documentary evidence: early Ottoman land deeds suggest that a holy man known as Sheikh Edebali lived at the same time as Osman, and there is some evidence that Osman married his daughter as one of his two wives.³⁶

At the heart of Ertuğrul's lands at Söğüt is a small mosque bearing his name, and a tomb, said to have been built for him as an open structure by his son Osman and later enclosed by Osman's son Orhan.³⁷ However, since both mosque and tomb have been rebuilt so often that nothing of their original architectural form remains, no surviving buildings can with confidence be ascribed to Osman. Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth century, when Sultan Abdülhamid II sought to bolster his faltering regime by identifying it more closely with the great deeds of his illustrious forebears, he found it convenient to promote Söğüt as the Ottoman heartland and created there a veritable cemetery of the first Ottoman heroes. He rebuilt Ertuğrul's mausoleum and interred his purported remains in a marble sarcophagus, and added a grave for Ertuğrul's wife, one for Osman – even though he had been reburied in Bursa by his son Orhan – and graves for 25 of Osman's fellow warriors.³⁸ To the present day Söğüt remains a shrine and the site of an annual festival to commemorate the earliest days of the Ottomans.

Osman probably died in 1323–4, having secured for his heirs substantial territory in north-west Anatolia, stretching from his headquarters at

Yenişehir, the 'New City' (Melangeia), to Eskişehir, the 'Old City', with Söğüt at its centre. Yenişehir was strategically situated between İznik and Bursa, two places he had intended but failed to capture.³⁹ In 1326 his son Orhan captured Bursa and this important city became the new hub of Ottoman power. Like İznik and İzmit (Nicomedia), Bursa had for some time been isolated from Constantinople as a result of Osman's control of the surrounding countryside; Orhan continued his father's blockade of the city and starved the inhabitants into submission. The Moroccan traveller ibn Battuta reported that Orhan was the foremost and richest of the several Turcoman chiefs whose courts he visited during his sojourn in Anatolia in 1330–32. He further noted that Orhan never stayed in one place for long but moved constantly between the hundred or so fortresses he commanded, in order to make sure they were in good repair. When he visited newly-Ottoman Bursa, ibn Battuta found a city 'with fine bazaars and wide streets, surrounded on all sides by gardens and running springs'.⁴⁰ Here Orhan buried his father – or, rather, reburied him having moved his remains from Söğüt to this, his new capital – and his mother (who was probably not the daughter of Sheikh Edebali, but another woman). He was himself later buried here, together with his wives Asporça and Nilüfer and various family members,⁴¹ as was his son and successor, Murad, who was killed in 1389 at the battle of Kosovo Polje in Serbia. Bursa always held a special place in Ottoman dynastic memory and continued for some generations to be the favoured place of burial for members of the royal house, even after the court moved first to Edirne (Adrianople) and later to Constantinople.

In 1327 the western Thracian frontier of Byzantium was invaded by the Bulgarian tsar Michael Shishman, whose army twice came within sight of Edirne before a negotiated settlement was reached. Relieved at having been able to withstand this danger, Emperor Andronicus III Palaeologus (grandson of Andronicus II) and the commander-in-chief of his army, Grand Domestic John Cantacuzenus (later to rule as John VI), in 1329 turned to deal with the more threatening situation to the east. They met an army under the command of Orhan at Pelecanum, west of İzmit. Orhan declined to engage in full battle on the steep northern slopes of the Gulf of İzmit, but sent a force of archers to attack the Byzantine troops. Seeing that the Ottomans would not fight, the Emperor prepared to retreat; but he delayed and was wounded, his army was forced to turn to fight the pursuing Ottoman troops, and the confrontation ended in stalemate.

In 1331 İznik surrendered to an Ottoman siege begun some years earlier. Many of its inhabitants had already deserted the city for Constantinople, and seven months after its fall ibn Battuta found it 'in a mouldering

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condition and uninhabited except for a few men in the Sultan's service'.⁴² The loss of Iznik brought it home to Emperor Andronicus that he would not necessarily be able to ensure the survival of what remained of his empire – and most critically of Constantinople – by military means, and in 1331 he demeaned himself by going to meet Orhan who was then besieging Izmit. This first diplomatic encounter between a Byzantine emperor and the upstart leader of a new state was momentous: it resulted in once-proud Byzantium agreeing to pay the Ottomans in return for a guarantee that the Emperor be allowed to retain the little territory he still held in Anatolia.

The defences of Izmit were sound: like Iznik and Bursa, it was able to withstand a long siege, and it was not until 1337 that its inhabitants succumbed to the blockade of the approaches to the city. The very length of these sieges demonstrated the strength of the Ottomans: they did not yet have gunpowder technology but they could field enough men to maintain control of territories already won, and also assign an army to remain camped outside the walls of a city over a significant period of time. The raiding tactics of Osman's forces had been appropriate to their nomadic origins: Orhan was gradually adopting the techniques of a sedentary army sustained by a settled population.

Not only the Ottomans and the Bulgars were threatening Byzantium, however. The emirate of Karesi was almost as close to Constantinople as the Ottomans, and by the 1330s had occupied territory on the north Aegean coast of Anatolia west of a line running from the Sea of Marmara to the Gulf of Edremit. Its long coastline and access to the sea gave it a strategic advantage over the Ottomans who remained as yet an inland power. Karesi's control of the Dardanelles Straits posed a real danger to the remaining Byzantine enclaves in the Balkans and on two occasions in the 1330s the Karesi Turcomans crossed over to Thrace with their horses and raided inland before the Byzantines were saved by the arrival of crusading galleys which destroyed the Karesi fleet.⁴³

The Orthodox Byzantines and their Church had been branded as schismatics by the Catholic Latins since 1054; moreover the Latin occupation of Constantinople between 1204 and 1261 was still a vivid memory, and in the difficulties in which the Emperor now found himself this old rivalry flared again. Intimation that the common Christian faith of Orthodox and Catholic counted for nothing came in 1337 when the Genoese, from their trading colony at Galata (also known as Pera) across the Golden Horn from Constantinople, made contact with Orhan in support of his plans to attack the Byzantine capital. The Emperor sent a mission to the Pope indicating that he might be willing to give ground on the contentious matter of Orthodox–Catholic religious differences if help were forthcoming against

the Ottomans.⁴⁴ So sensitive was the issue of Byzantium's refusal to renounce the Orthodox faith and reunite its Church with Rome, and so wide the breach between successive popes and emperors, that there had been very little communication between them for some fifty years before this approach.

The death of Emperor Andronicus III in 1341 plunged Byzantium into civil war. Emir Umur Bey of Aydın and the Emir of Saruhan had earlier helped him with their navies to ward off Latin attacks on Byzantine possessions in the Aegean and Umur Bey now took the side of Andronicus' successor and regent for his young son, his trusted adviser John VI with John enabled him to raid into the Balkans. This prompted a western crusade which in 1344 burnt his outlet to the sea, the fortress and port of İzmir (Smyrna).⁴⁵ The Ottomans also formed an alliance with the new emperor when Orhan married John's daughter Theodora in a splendid ceremony in 1346.⁴⁶

Political correctness in its most literal sense set in early among the Ottomans: their chroniclers mention neither Orhan's alliance with the Christian Byzantine emperor John VI, nor his marriage to Princess Theodora. To have done so would have been to undermine their picture of an Islamic empire in the making. By contrast, a fifteenth-century Ottoman chronicler of the house of Aydın (which had by then vanished) did not scruple to reveal that John had had to call upon the help of Umur Bey and had also offered him one of his daughters.⁴⁷ Similar fluidity of alliances between Ottomans and Christians was characteristic of the final century of Byzantium and continued once Byzantium was no more. Just as the first Ottoman warriors formed strategic alliances regardless of religious considerations, so the mature Ottoman Empire entered coalitions with one Christian state against another as *realpolitik* demanded. The pervasive notion of permanent and irreconcilable division between the Muslim and Christian worlds at this time is a fiction.

By the same token, as the Ottomans made alliances with one Christian state or another, so they attacked their own co-religionists and annexed their lands. Yet conquest of their Muslim neighbours in Anatolia posed a thorny problem. Campaigns against and conquest of Christian states required no justification, for these states were considered the 'abode of war', non-Muslim regions whose absorption into the Islamic lands, the 'abode of Islam', was only a matter of time. The chroniclers were at pains, however, to avoid having to justify canonically-questionable aggression against fellow Muslims, and the motives for Ottoman expansion at the expense of their Muslim rivals were traditionally disguised. The annexation of Karesi, the first of the rival Turcoman emirates to be taken by the Ottomans, is a case

in point: Orhan took advantage of factionalism inside the emirate of Karesi in the mid-1340s, but the episode is portrayed by the chroniclers as a peaceful submission by the inhabitants.

After 1350 Ottoman activities began for the first time to impinge directly on the interests of European states. Between 1351 and 1355 Genoa and Venice were involved in a war over control of the lucrative Black Sea trade. Soon after the arrival of the protagonists of the Fourth Crusade at Constantinople in 1204, Venice had acquired a colony at Tana (Azov) at the head of the Sea of Azov, while Genoa had a number of colonies on the Black Sea shores, including at Caffa (Feodosiya) in the Crimea. These colonies were entrepôts for the export to the west of raw materials such as furs, silk, spices, precious stones and pearls. Orhan took the side of Genoa in the conflict with Venice, supplying both its fleet and its trading colony at Galata, and in 1352 concluded a treaty with his ally; his forces also assisted the Genoese when Galata came under attack from Venetian and Byzantine troops.⁴⁸

The Genoese provided Orhan's forces with boats to ferry them across the Bosphorus,⁴⁹ but it was the beleaguered John Cantacuzenus who unwittingly helped the Ottomans establish a permanent presence in Thrace. In 1352, at John's invitation, a band of mercenary soldiers referred to in the texts as 'Turks' garrisoned the Byzantine fort of Tzympe in the vicinity of the town of Bolayır, north-east of Gelibolu (Gallipoli) on the north shore of the Dardanelles. Shortly thereafter, these 'Turks' offered their allegiance to Süleyman Pasha, son of Orhan, and the Ottomans acquired their first stronghold in the Balkans.⁵⁰ The establishment of Ottoman bases in Thrace was the decisive event of Orhan's reign and its treatment by the Ottoman chroniclers is instructive. Concerned to represent the Ottoman expansion into Thrace, of which Süleyman was the architect, as proceeding from the favour of God and Ottoman skill and valour, they conveniently obscured the crucial part played by the men of the former lands of the Karesi emirate who had fought alongside him.⁵¹

The chroniclers were not even prepared to accord the forces of nature a role in the Ottoman conquests. Byzantine sources refer to an earthquake in 1354 – two years after the initial Ottoman forays across the Straits – which destroyed the walls of Gelibolu and ruined a number of other towns on the north-west coast of the Sea of Marmara; these were then occupied by Ottoman and other Turkish forces. The Byzantine chroniclers made much of the earthquake as an excuse for their weakness in the face of a superior foe – but there is no reference to it in Ottoman sources.⁵²

These events in Thrace precipitated the abdication of Emperor John VI Cantacuzenus in favour of his son Matthew, who ruled briefly before being

succeeded by Andronicus III's son John V Palaeologus. When Orhan's youngest son Halil, still only a child, was captured by Genoese pirates in 1357, the new emperor became involved in delicate negotiations to engineer his ransom and release, thus bringing the Byzantines some respite: the next two years saw little advance on the Ottoman frontier. John Palaeologus, aspiring to unite Byzantine and Ottoman territories, married his daughter Irene to Halil – in the hope that Halil would succeed his father as, under the Ottoman system where each son theoretically had an equal chance of succeeding, he might have done. But the plan came to nothing, for it was Halil's older brother Murad who took their father's place.

Peaceful coexistence between Orhan and John Palaeologus was to prove a mirage. Orhan had intended his eldest son, Süleyman Pasha, to succeed him but Süleyman died in 1357, shortly after Halil's capture, as the result of a fall from his horse; his steed was buried next to him in Bolayır, where their graves can still be seen.⁵³ Murad was sent to take Süleyman's place as commander-in-chief on the Thracian frontier and with the help of local commanders he achieved further victories, so that when Orhan died in 1362 the Ottomans had occupied much of southern Thrace and were in possession of the important Byzantine city of Didymoteicho to the south of Edirne. As the frontier moved west, so did the seat of the sultan and his court – from Yenişehir to Bursa to Didymoteicho, and then to Edirne, captured sometime in the 1360s. The lands of Karesi on the northern Aegean coast of Anatolia were under Ottoman control at Orhan's death, and his domains reached as far east as Ankara (the capital of modern Turkey), captured from a rival Turcoman dynasty by Süleyman Pasha. In an inscription in the Alaeddin Mosque in Ankara⁵⁴ dating from the year of his death, Orhan is identified for the first time as 'Sultan', signifying Ottoman claims to absolute power. Other emirs of western Anatolia took up the challenge and soon adopted this title themselves: Germiyan and Karaman in 1368–9, Aydın in 1374, Saruhan in 1376 and Menteşe in 1377.⁵⁵

The rapid expansion of the Ottoman domains under Orhan is clearly legible in the architecture of his time. The stamp of the new regime was firmest in the major cities of İznik and Bursa but some thirty mosques in the small towns and villages of north-west Anatolia also bear his name. In the cities he constructed the mosques, bath-houses, theological colleges, public kitchens, bridges, tombs, and dervish lodges that identified them as Islamic and Ottoman. Orhan also commemorated his father's conquests by building mosques and other structures necessary for Muslim life in places Osman had conquered, and many of the buildings of his time bear the names of other figures – warriors and holy men alike – who were prominent in the success of the Ottomans. Süleyman Pasha is remembered in

mosques, theological colleges and baths in the Ottoman heartland in Anatolia and others mark his conquests in Thrace, including the former church of Hagia Sophia in Vize (Bizye), which he converted into a mosque.⁵⁶ Such a change of function upon Ottoman conquest was typical, especially when a town had not surrendered but had been taken by force. The resettlement of Turkish populations in the wake of the frontier warriors slowly brought prosperity to Thrace once more. The weight of the Byzantine feudal regime had long since alienated many of the indigenous Christians from the provincial aristocracy and from their masters in Constantinople, a state of affair exacerbated by the great destruction wrought during the civil war of the early 1340s.

The Byzantine emperors at Constantinople still hoped that western Christendom would rescue them from the Ottomans who, it was clear from their expansion into Thrace, did not intend any permanent accommodation. Yet whenever an appeal for western aid was made, the same conditions were attached to the response – the Orthodox Byzantines must abandon their schismatic ways and accept the Church of Rome. What help did reach Constantinople was dictated by the political, diplomatic and commercial concerns of individual states. In 1364 John Palaeologus turned to the fellow Orthodox state of Serbia, a potential ally which was by now also threatened by Ottoman expansion; but Serbia had lost its former vitality following the death of its king Stephen Dušan in 1355, as his successors competed for power. Next John travelled to Hungary to seek the help of King Louis, but to no avail. The only hopeful sign was the recovery of the key Thracian port of Gelibolu by a Latin naval force in 1366 as the first strike in a modest crusade in support of the beleaguered Byzantines. A Byzantine embassy to Rome was followed in 1369 by the Emperor himself, who in his desperation promised to accept the Latin rite as the price of papal assistance; but the emptiness of papal assurances was soon revealed, for no help was forthcoming.

Byzantium was not alone in its fear of Ottoman encroachment in the Balkans. Following the conquest of Edirne in the 1360s the various successors to Stephen Dušan's Serbia felt Ottoman pressure on their southern and eastern frontiers. Realizing the consequences if the Ottomans were not halted, some among these petty rulers united to field an army, but the battle of Çirmen on the Maritsa river west of Edirne in 1371 was a disaster for the Serbian lords: defeated, they became Ottoman vassals as did the three rulers of Bulgaria who fought alongside them, and all obstacles to the advance of the Ottomans into Macedonia were removed.

The expansion of the frontier was shared with quasi-independent fighters who had thrown in their lot with the Ottomans. Four such Muslim

families were particularly prominent during the Ottoman conquest of Rumeli (the name they used for the Balkan peninsula): these were the Evrenosoğulları,* the Mihaloğulları, the Turahanoğulları, and the Malkoçoğulları. The first two of these families were Christian warriors in north-west Anatolia who had crossed to Thrace as the Ottoman frontier advanced and converted to Islam, while the Malkoç dynasty, properly known as Malković, were of Christian, Serb origin; the origins of the Turahanoğulları remain obscure.⁵⁷

Of these families the Evrenosoğulları achieved the greatest renown. Gazi Evrenos was said to have been a former ally of the house of Karesi, and to have crossed the Dardanelles with Orhan's son Süleyman.⁵⁸ From 1361, when he captured the town for the Ottomans, he had his base at Komotini, then on the Serbian frontier, and was responsible for erecting some of the earliest Ottoman buildings in Rumeli. As the frontier advanced Gazi Evrenos moved his seat westward, lastly to Giannitsa, which he founded, and where he died and was buried in 1417.⁵⁹

Sultan Murad remained in Rumeli following Orhan's death in 1362 until in 1373 he crossed the Dardanelles to campaign in Anatolia, accompanied by John V Palaeologus, who had recently become his vassal. Murad's son Savcı and John's son Andronicus chose this moment to rebel against their fathers who swiftly returned home, John to Constantinople and Murad to Rumeli. Murad had Savcı and his fellow rebels killed; Andronicus surrendered and at Murad's insistence was imprisoned and blinded. Little else is known of Savcı: the Ottoman chronicle tradition did not countenance Ottoman princes who contested parental authority – especially those who did so in alliance with a Christian prince.

The real loser, at least for a time, was John Palaeologus' younger son Manuel. He had been designated his father's successor soon after the revolt of Andronicus, but when the strife between John and Andronicus was eventually resolved in 1381 the succession was altered in favour of Andronicus' son, another John. Manuel fled to Thessalonica, a Macedonian city of great significance in the Byzantine world as an intellectual and artistic centre, and there set up an independent court. This was quite contrary to Ottoman interests, and his disquiet at Manuel's military activities against the Ottoman advance in this part of Macedonia prompted Murad to action. His commander Kara ('Black') Halil Hayreddin Çandarlı took Serres and other cities in southern Macedonia and in 1387, after a four-year siege, Manuel left Thessalonica and the city accepted Ottoman sovereignty – although it was not until seven years after this formal subjugation that the Ottomans,

* The suffix '-oğulları' means 'sons of' in Turkish; the often interchangeable '-oğlu' means 'son of'.

having been engaged elsewhere, removed the native Byzantine functionaries and were able to occupy the city and its hinterland and impose their administration. Soon after the fall of Thessalonica Manuel accepted that he must become an Ottoman vassal. He was punished by John V for his abandonment of the city by being exiled to the north Aegean island of Lemnos where he may have spent the next three years. In 1390 his father summoned him to Constantinople against Andronicus' son John who claimed the throne as John VII – Andronicus had died in 1385 – but Manuel persuaded his nephew to go to Genoa to seek help against the Ottomans. Returning home in 1390 John VII was expelled from Constantinople and fled to the Sultan; when John V died in 1391, Manuel succeeded him to the Byzantine throne as Manuel II Palaeologus.⁶⁰

Kara Halil Hayreddin Çandarlı was a scion of an Anatolian Muslim dynasty which subsequently furnished the Ottomans with a number of eminent statesmen. His mosque, dating from 1385, is the oldest recorded Ottoman monument in Serres.⁶¹ The various offices held by Kara Halil Hayreddin are evidence of the way the Ottoman state was evolving from its nomadic origins to become based on a core of secure territory behind the fluid frontier. Murad's reign is as significant for its administrative developments as for the extent of his conquests. Kara Halil Hayreddin held the post of *kadı* (judge) in İznik and Bursa and then became Murad's first chief justice and also his chief minister, in addition to his military command. This joint supervision over army and administration made him, in effect, the first grand vezir of the Ottoman state.⁶²

In preparation for the siege of Thessalonica Murad transferred large numbers of troops to Rumeli, where those not engaged in the blockade of Manuel's stronghold operated against other petty lords of this politically-fragmented region. They pushed into Epirus and Albania, and in 1386 took the city of Niš from the Serbian prince Lazar, giving the Ottomans access to the Morava river valley, which led north-west towards Belgrade and the heart of central Europe and westwards into Bosnia and to Dubrovnik (Ragusa) on the Adriatic coast. Soon afterwards, Murad's Bulgarian vassals declared their independence of Ottoman suzerainty. Among them was John III Shishman, ruler from Veliko Tŭrnovo of the largest share of the divided medieval Bulgarian kingdom, and Murad's brother-in-law. Early in 1388 an army under Çandarlı Ali Pasha, son of Kara Halil Hayreddin, marched through the snowy Balkan passes and many of the towns of John Shishman's northern Bulgarian domains surrendered at his advance; they were returned to Shishman, but he was left in no doubt that he was Murad's vassal. However, further Ottoman incursions into Serbia in 1388 met defeat in battle at Bileća, north-east of Dubrovnik, at the hands of an alliance of Bosnian princes.⁶³

Murad seems to have assumed that Lazar of Serbia had been involved in the Ottoman defeat at Bileća, and in 1389 he invaded Serbia, apparently with the intention of punishing him before continuing onward into Bosnia.⁶⁴ On 15 June Murad's army met Lazar's at Kosovo Polje, the 'Field of Blackbirds', near the town of Priština. The Ottoman force numbered some 25,000 men, the combined Serbian-Kosovan-Bosnian army roughly 16,000. When the battle ended eight hours later, the Ottomans were victorious but both sovereigns were dead. At some point during the fighting Murad had become isolated from the body of his army and one of Lazar's commanders approached him, pretending that he was defecting to the Ottomans. Instead, he stabbed the Sultan dead. Lazar was soon captured and decapitated in Murad's tent.⁶⁵

When news of Murad's death reached Europe, King Charles VI of France thanked God in Notre-Dame.⁶⁶ But hope that this might also be the demise of the Ottomans was mere wishful thinking: Murad's son Bayezid took command on his father's death, and ensured his succession by having his brother Yakub killed in the first recorded fratricide in the history of the Ottoman dynasty; it is unclear whether Yakub was murdered while the battle still raged, or some months later.⁶⁷ Serbia became an Ottoman vassal, obliged to pay tribute and supply troops, with Lazar's son Stephen at its head. Bosnia remained independent, as did Kosovo, under its lord Vuk Branković, until 1392.

Although Kosovo Polje cost the Ottomans their sultan, the price paid by Serbia was far greater. Bayezid's victory signalled the end of the independent Serbian kingdom, and confirmed the permanence of the Ottoman presence in the Balkans. Today, more than 600 years later, the battle of Kosovo Polje still figures vividly in the Serbian national consciousness as a defining historical moment. Epic poems recited down the ages dramatized and immortalized the memory of the defeat of a Christian king by a Muslim sultan in a Christian heartland. Such epics fuelled the emotions of the Christian Serbian population of the region in the terrible wars of the late twentieth century: they saw an opportunity to remove from their midst the Muslim population still, even after so many centuries, seen by many as alien. And the Muslim population as readily responds to assert its right to remain.

SULTAN MURAD I died on the western frontier of his state. His son and successor Sultan Bayezid I hoped that the weakened position of Serbia and his marriage after the battle at Kosovo Polje to Olivera, sister of the new Serbian despot Stephen Lazarević, would prevent any further attacks on his Balkan possessions, for he had business in the east where his father's expansion of the Ottoman territories had made conflict with the numerous other Turcoman Muslim emirates of Anatolia inevitable. The great energy he devoted to campaigning earned Bayezid the soubriquet 'Yıldırım', 'Thunderbolt'.

The succession of Bayezid emboldened the Anatolian emirates to join an anti-Ottoman alliance headed by his brother-in-law Alaeddin Bey, emir of Karaman, the most indomitable of all the Turcoman Muslim states in its efforts to counter Ottoman expansionism. Alaeddin Bey had wed Bayezid's sister Nefise Sultan in 1378 when the balance of power between the two states was still unresolved. Dynastic marriage could be a useful diplomatic tool, but did not always guarantee the allegiance of a potential ally or secure the loyalty of a potential foe. Since the inferiority of the bride's family was implicit, the Ottomans gave their princesses in marriage only to other Muslim princes, not to Christians (although Christian and other Muslim rulers alike gave their princesses in marriage to members of the Ottoman house in its early years in hope of an alliance).¹ Nor did they give them to their partners in conquest – the Evrenosoğulları, Mihaloğulları or Turahanogulları – fearing perhaps that this might embolden these Ottoman marcher-lords to challenge the pre-eminence of the Ottoman household.² Recognition of Ottoman ascendancy over one rival emirate was symbolized by Bayezid's marriage to the Germiyan princess Sultan Hatun in 1381, by which he acquired the emirate of Germiyan.

The Ottomans were eager to push southwards towards the Mediterranean through Germiyan and the emirate of Hamid – supposedly sold to Murad in the 1380s – in pursuit of the reliable sources of revenue they needed if their state was to flourish. One of the main trade routes from the east crossed the Mediterranean to the south Anatolian port of Antalya and ran

north through Hamid and Germiyan to the Black Sea basin or into the Balkans.³ Karaman was prepared to contest Ottoman attempts to control the trade routes and the customs dues and other taxes that went with the territory, and the first clash occurred in 1386, while Sultan Murad was still alive. In the Ottoman chronicle tradition, correctness required that Alaeddin be blamed for initiating hostilities, and he is therefore said to have attacked Ottoman territory at the entreaty of Murad's daughter, Alaeddin's bride; Murad did not pursue the conflict at this time.

Having secured his western frontier, Sultan Bayezid swiftly moved east. His army recovered Germiyan – apparently lost since his marriage to Sultan Hatun – and annexed Aydın, whose princess he also married.⁴ He reduced the emirates of Saruhan and Menteşe at this time so that the Ottomans controlled all of western Anatolia and their domains bordered Karaman in south-central Anatolia. In 1391 Bayezid summoned his vassals Stephen Lazarević and Manuel II Palaeologus, who was now the Byzantine emperor, and together they marched east to seize the north-central Anatolian territory of Kastamonu from the İsfendiyar emirs. Little more was achieved and the armies returned home by December of that year. Manuel Palaeologus appeased Bayezid, but the letters he wrote on campaign vividly convey his despair and deep unease at his invidious position:

Certainly the Romans had a name for the small plain where we are now when they lived and ruled here . . . There are many cities here, but they lack what constitutes the true splendour of a city . . . that is, human beings. Most now lie in ruins . . . not even the names have survived . . . I cannot tell you exactly where we are . . . It is hard to bear all this . . . the scarcity of supplies, the severity of winter and the sickness which has struck down many of our men . . . [have] greatly depressed me . . . It is unbearable . . . to be unable to see anything, hear anything, do anything during all this time which could somehow . . . lift our spirit. This terribly oppressive time makes no concession to us who regard it of prime importance to remain aloof from and to have absolutely nothing to do with what we are now involved in or anything connected with it, for we are not educated for this sort of thing, nor accustomed to enjoy it, nor is it in our nature. The blame lies with the present state of affairs, not to mention the individual [i.e. Bayezid] whose fault they are.⁵

In the winter of 1393–4, relations between the two rulers entered a new phase when Bayezid heard that Manuel had proposed reconciliation to his nephew and rival John VII Palaeologus – who had ruled as emperor briefly in 1390 – in the hope that united they might be able to resist the Ottomans. It was John himself, eager to secure Bayezid's favour, who reported Manuel's suggestion.⁶ Shortly thereafter Bayezid summoned his Christian vassals to Serres in Macedonia: they included Manuel's brother Theodore, despot of

the Morea (roughly, the Peloponnese), Manuel's father-in-law Constantine Dragaš, Prince of Serres, Stephen Lazarević of Serbia – and John VII. Their arrival in Serres was orchestrated so that each would arrive separately, unaware that the others would be present. Manuel's account makes it clear that Bayezid's invitation was not one that could be refused, and that he feared the Sultan intended to kill them all:

For the Turk had with him those who in some capacity or other were leaders of the Christians . . . wishing utterly to destroy them all; while they thought to go [to Serres] and face the danger, rather than do so later on as a result of disobeying his orders. They had indeed good reason for thinking that it was dangerous to be in his presence, especially together at the same time.⁷

Manuel's fears for their immediate safety proved groundless. Bayezid reprimanded them sternly for misgoverning their domains – perhaps to jumpstart future incursions into their territories – and sent them on their way. In spring 1394, however, the Sultan embarked upon a siege of Constantinople, first constructing a castle at the narrowest point of the Bosphorus, some five kilometres north of the city on the Asian shore; this was called Güzelcehimek ('Beauteous Castle'), today Anadolu Hisarı. The walls of Constantinople had withstood many sieges over the centuries and again defied all attempts to breach them.

It was not only to Byzantium that the Ottomans posed a threat. Bayezid also aimed to weaken Venice, which was a significant naval power with numerous colonies and possessions in the Aegean, on the Dalmatian coast and in the Peloponnese. Venice relied on trade for its prosperity and the continuing presence in the region of Florentine, Catalan, and Neapolitan outposts, each with their own commercial and political interests, made for an uneasy pattern of alliances which was complicated by the rise of Ottoman power as different Christian lords sought Ottoman help against their rivals. Sultan Murad I had inclined towards Venice in his overall strategy; Bayezid's policy was closer to that of his grandfather Orhan who had allied with Genoa against Venice.⁸ Bayezid's threat to Byzantine strongholds in the Peloponnese during the early 1390s, as well as his occupation of Thessalonica in 1394 and his siege of Constantinople, were in part directed by his need to pre-empt a Byzantine–Venetian alliance.⁹ The Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem in Rhodes were yet another force in the region. They were a military religious order which had emerged in Jerusalem during the crusades of the twelfth century. Following the loss of Jerusalem to the Muslims in 1187, they were based at Acre for a century before being forced to move to Cyprus with the fall of that city in 1291, and in 1306 they made Rhodes their headquarters. During the final years of the fourteenth century the

Hospitallers were engaged in trying to create a presence in the Peloponnese, and in 1397 took over Corinth from Despot Theodore, in exchange for a promise that they would resist Ottoman attacks from the north. They took control of Mistras in 1400, but Latin occupation of the capital of the despotate provoked an insurrection, and by 1404 the Hospitallers agreed to withdraw.

Bayezid's most dangerous enemy in the Balkans was the kingdom of Hungary, at this time one of the largest states in Europe. Because it had resisted the Mongol invasion of the mid-thirteenth century and served the interests of the pope by sending missionaries to stamp out the heresies of Orthodox Christianity and of the Bogomils, it was regarded as Catholic Europe's eastern bulwark.¹⁰ Hungarian and Ottoman spheres of influence had come into collision after the battle of Kosovo Polje and Bayezid's aim now was to undermine Hungary's attempts to rally its Balkan allies. In 1393 he had annexed the rebellious John Shishman's possessions in Danubian Bulgaria to counter the raids south across the Danube of Voyvode Mircea of Wallachia, a Hungarian client. In 1395 Bayezid went into battle against Mircea, who had concluded a defence pact with Hungary – Mircea was forced to flee. The Ottoman conquest of Macedonia was completed in the same year. Such Ottoman successes in the Balkans lent urgency to Hungarian pleas for help from the West, and this time the threat coincided with a rare period of co-operation between would-be crusaders – notably the knights of France and England – and their governments. On 25 September 1396 the crusading armies met the Ottoman forces under Bayezid's command at Nikopol (Nicopolis) on the Danube. The crusaders were inspired more by the successes of their forebears than by religion. In their impatience to meet the enemy, the French knights refused to concede that King Sigismund of Hungary's Wallachian allies were more experienced in fighting the mobile Ottoman cavalry than were the cumbersome western armies, and deprived him of overall command. Notwithstanding, Sigismund's own forces came near to putting Bayezid to flight (though Sigismund himself was only saved by his vassal Stephen Lazarević); but the outcome was victory for the Ottomans.¹¹

The Ottoman success at Nikopol gave Bayezid control over the Balkans south of the Danube. After the battle he crossed the river into Hungary for the first time, and his army raided far and wide. A young Bavarian crusader named Johann Schiltberger described his narrow escape from execution: the day after the battle, many Christian prisoners were killed in cold blood, but he was spared because of his youth and taken into captivity together with a number of nobles.¹² By contrast, the nobles captured with him were ransomed within nine months after the intercession of their peers

and the presentation to Bayezid of sumptuous gifts and 300,000 florins in cash.*¹³

Sultan Bayezid's successes in the Balkans did not impress his brother-in-law Alaeddin. The Karamanid ruler refused to acknowledge himself subject to the Ottomans. 'I am as great a lord as thyself,' he claimed, in the words of Schiltberger,¹⁴ who was in Bayezid's suite as he led a victorious army against the Karamanid city of Konya after his victory on the Danube. Alaeddin paid with his life for this hubris and the Karamanid emirate lost its independence.

This annexation of Karaman relieved the pressure from one rival state, but on their eastern frontier the Ottomans were still challenged in the north by Kadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad, who had eluded Bayezid on an earlier campaign. Kadi Burhan al-Din, a poet and man of learning, had usurped the throne of the Eretna dynasty whose seat was at Sivas in northern Anatolia.¹⁵ Whereas the Ottomans saw themselves as heirs to the Seljuk state in Anatolia and Karaman's resistance to their bid for domination was that of a rival emirate of similar Turcoman origins, Kadi Burhan al-Din represented the Ilkhanid inheritors of the Mongol empire of Genghis Khan. As the armies of Tamerlane, the already legendary Mongol ruler of Transoxiana in Central Asia, were to prove, the Mongol challenge was vastly more dangerous. The distinction between the Ottomans' subjects and those of Kadi Burhan al-Din was noted by Emperor Manuel II as he moved east with Bayezid on campaign in 1391; he referred to the Turkish population of western Anatolia as 'Persians', the common Byzantine usage at this period, but called Kadi Burhan al-Din's people 'Scythians', the word used to indicate Mongols.¹⁶

By 1397 Bayezid's siege of Constantinople had become a relentless blockade and Emperor Manuel again sought help from abroad to save the Byzantine capital. In June 1399, after much diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing between Paris, London, Rome and Constantinople, Charles VI of France sent a small army to aid Manuel. At its head was a marshal of France, Jean Boucicaut, one of the nobles captured at Nikopol, imprisoned and then ransomed by the Ottomans. Only by forcing his way through the Ottoman blockade could Boucicaut reach Manuel. He realized that his army was inadequate to relieve Constantinople and prevailed upon the Emperor to travel to Europe and put his case in person. In December Boucicaut began

* Schiltberger subsequently entered Bayezid's service, and six years later at the battle of Ankara was captured by 'Tamerlane', the Mongol conqueror Timur, in his victory over the Sultan; he long remained a slave of Tamerlane and his successors, but eventually escaped captivity and returned home after thirty-two years away.

the return journey with Manuel in his company, travelling to Venice by sea and thence slowly overland to Paris where the Emperor remained for six months. On 21 December 1400 he arrived in London and was escorted into the city by King Henry IV. Manuel's evident piety and sincerity won him sympathy and the exotic appearance of his suite of bearded priests was a cause of wonder wherever they went during the two months of their visit. As Adam of Usk, a contemporary English chronicler, observed:

This Emperor always walked with his men, dressed alike and in one colour, namely white, in long robes cut like tabards . . . No razor touched head or beard of his chaplains. These Greeks were most devout in their church services, which were joined in as well by soldiers as by priests, for they chanted them without distinction in their native tongue.¹⁷

Received by both Charles and Henry with splendour and accorded every courtesy, Manuel was convinced that whatever help he needed to resist Bayezid would be forthcoming. But the money collected for Manuel throughout England seemed to have disappeared (and the matter of its disappearance was still being investigated in 1426).¹⁸

Manuel returned home early in 1403 to find his world greatly changed. His city had been saved from imminent destruction by an event which seemed to presage the end of Ottoman power: the defeat at Ankara of Bayezid's army by that of Tamerlane. Bayezid's defeat turned Anatolia upside down and brought severe disruption to the Balkans. In the longer term, it also enabled Constantinople to survive as the Byzantine capital for another half-century.

Thirty years previously, Tamerlane had embarked on a series of campaigns which took him from China to Iran and culminated, as far as the Ottomans were concerned, with the confrontation at Ankara. Tamerlane saw himself as the successor of Genghis Khan and inheritor, therefore, of the Seljuk–Ilkhanid territories in Anatolia – which put him in a powerful position to exploit the divisions rife among the patchwork of local dynasties who were still independent. Bayezid, however, was encroaching upon these same lands and with Ottoman seizure of Sivas after the murder of its emir Kadı Burhan al-Din Ahmad in the summer of 1398, Bayezid's and Tamerlane's spheres of influence abutted in eastern Anatolia. In a defiant statement of his own independence from Tamerlane, Bayezid applied to the Caliph in Cairo for the title of 'Sultan of Rum', borne by the Seljuk sultans of Anatolia. Tamerlane demanded that Bayezid recognize him as suzerain but Bayezid refused unequivocally.¹⁹ Kadı Burhan al-Din's murderer, the chief of the Akkoyunlu ('White Sheep') Turcoman tribal confederation whose base was at Diyarbakır in south-eastern Anatolia,

appealed to Tamerlane who responded in 1399 by embarking on the longest expedition of his reign. This was to last seven years.

At around the same time Bayezid was persuaded by his allies Sultan Ahmad Jalayir of Baghdad and the chief of the Karakoyunlu ('Black Sheep') Turcoman tribal confederation, centred on Van in eastern Anatolia, to organize a campaign to seize some Mamluk strongholds west of the Euphrates. This met with some success but was a bold affront to Tamerlane. In the summer of 1400, while Bayezid was occupied with the siege of Constantinople, Tamerlane took Sivas and then advanced south along the Euphrates and into Mamluk territory as far as Damascus, before turning towards Azerbaijan.²⁰

Tamerlane's and Bayezid's armies met near Ankara on 28 July 1402. Tamerlane fielded some 140,000 men while Bayezid's army totalled 85,000. Among his forces Tamerlane could count the disaffected former rulers of the western Anatolian emirates whose lands had come under Ottoman control soon after Bayezid came to the throne. These rulers, the deposed emirs of Aydın, Saruhan, Menteşe, and Germiyan, had all sought refuge at Tamerlane's court while the men who had formerly owed them allegiance were now Bayezid's subjects and under his command. Bayezid's own forces of cavalry and infantry supplied the core of his army – among the latter were janissaries, *yeniçeri* in Turkish, meaning 'new force', the infantry corps which was first raised during the reign of Sultan Murad I from prisoners of war captured in the Christian lands of the Balkans and was institutionalized through Bayezid's use of the *devşirme* levy of youths among his Balkan Christian subjects to ensure a reliable source of manpower.* Also in Bayezid's army was his vassal Stephen Lazarević of Serbia, and Vlachs from recently-conquered Thessaly. Further support came from 'Tatars', who, says Johann Schiltberger in his short eyewitness account of the battle at which he became Tamerlane's captive, numbered 30,000 men from 'White Tartary',²¹ suggesting that they had fled west before Tamerlane's advance from their lands north of the Caspian and Black Seas. This has recently been questioned, and it seems that these 'Tatars' may instead have been Turcoman tribesmen from eastern Anatolia.²²

The battle lasted all day. The opposing armies were drawn up in similar formation with the rulers in the centre surrounded by their infantry – in Bayezid's case, the janissaries – with their cavalry on the wings. The earliest

* From this time until the early seventeenth century Ottoman officials would periodically (but as time went by increasingly sporadically) visit Christian villages (at first those in the Balkans rather than Anatolia) to select youths for intensive education as soldiers, for administrative posts, and for service in the palaces of the sultan and his senior statesmen. All the youths chosen were obliged to convert to Islam and those channelled into the military force, in particular, were trained to be loyal only to the sultan.

account of the battle is that of a Cretan who fought with Bayezid but fled the field:

Bayezid's army was made up of 160 companies. At first, Timur's [i.e. Tamerlane's] army routed four of these, the commanders of [three of] which were Tami Cozafero Morchesbei [i.e. Firuz Bey], the great Muslim Leader, Bayezid's son [i.e. Prince Süleyman] and Count Lazzero's son [i.e. Stephen Lazarević] . . . [the fourth] was Bayezid's. His men fought so bravely that most of Timur's troops dispersed, believing Timur to have lost the battle; but he was elsewhere and immediately sent 100,000 men to surround Bayezid and his company. They captured Bayezid and two of his sons. Only six of Bayezid's companies took part in the battle, the rest fled. Timur emerged victorious.²³

Commentators noted that Tamerlane's army arrived first at Ankara and camped by a stream, leaving Bayezid's men and their steeds without water. Schiltberger wrote that Tamerlane had thirty-two trained elephants²⁴ from the backs of which he is reported to have launched the legendary liquid incendiary agent known as 'Greek fire' at the Ottoman army.²⁵ This might well account for the confusion which led Bayezid to believe that he had won, only to find himself encircled and defeated. The Ottoman chroniclers, however, agree that Bayezid lost the battle thanks to the desertion of many of his forces: both the numerous 'Tatars' and the troops from the once independent west Anatolian emirates who failed to fight. Bayezid and his son Musa were taken prisoner, and possibly also his Serbian wife and his son Mustafa. His sons İsa, Süleyman and Mehmed fled. Bayezid's conquests were undone in a day. Before Tamerlane's invasion his domains had stretched from the Danube almost to the Euphrates; now, Ottoman territory was roughly reduced to that bequeathed him by his father in 1389. The eight-year blockade of Constantinople came to an end. Tamerlane restored their lands to the emirs of Karaman, Germiyan, Aydın, Saruhan and Menteşe, and enforced his claim to the rest of Bayezid's domains in Anatolia in a year-long irruption of raiding and pillage.

When they came to write the story of Bayezid's defeat at Ankara, the chroniclers sought explanations for the disaster which had befallen the Ottomans. The fifteenth-century chronicler Aşıkpaşazade held Bayezid responsible for the defeat, branding him a debauchee – a view with which the Sultan's contemporaries concurred²⁶ – and blaming his Serbian wife for encouraging him to drink; he also criticized Bayezid's vezir Çandarlı Ali Pasha for consorting with holy men whose religious credentials were suspect.²⁷ Tamerlane's victory was sufficiently humiliating, but for later generations, the greatest cause for regret was the struggle that ensued among the sons of Bayezid as they vied to succeed him. With Prince Musa and

possibly also Prince Mustafa in Tamerlane's hands following the battle at Ankara. Süleyman, Mehmed and İsa acted immediately to find allies to support their individual claims to the throne. Another son, Prince Yücel took refuge in Constantinople, converted to Christianity and was baptized Demetrius.²⁸ For the next twenty years civil war brought turmoil and suffering on an unprecedented scale to the Ottoman state.

In his ignominious defeat, the once-powerful ruler Bayezid made a tragic figure. Though Ottoman chroniclers a century after the battle of Ankara moved by his fate, wrote of Tamerlane putting Bayezid in an iron cage as he took the humbled sultan along with him on his victorious progress across Anatolia, historians consider this fanciful. More nearly contemporary Ottoman writers claimed that he died by his own hand, unable to bear the dishonour of his defeat.²⁹ The truth about Sultan Bayezid's fate appears to be more prosaic: he died of natural causes in March 1403 in the west-central Anatolian town of Akşehir – as Schiltberger had reported at the time.³⁰ His body was mummified and kept at first in the tomb of a Seljuk holy man. It is said by contemporary historians that his son Musa soon obtained permission from Tamerlane to remove the body to Bursa.³¹ According to the inscription on the tomb built for him here by his son Süleyman, he was buried in 1406.³² Several decades later the Byzantine historian Doukas wrote that Bayezid's grave was subsequently violated and his bones exhumed by the son of Alaeddin of Karaman, to avenge Bayezid's execution of his father in Konya in 1397.³³

The defeat of Sultan Bayezid became a popular subject for later western writers, composers and painters. They revelled in the legend that he was taken by Tamerlane to Samarkand, and embellished it with a cast of characters to create an oriental fantasy that has maintained its appeal. Christopher Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine the Great* was first performed in London in 1587, three years after the formal opening of English–Ottoman trade relations when William Harborne sailed for Istanbul as agent of the Levant Company. In 1648 there appeared the play *Le Gran Tamerlan et Bajezet* by Jean Magnon, and in 1725 Handel's *Tamerlano* was first performed in London; Vivaldi's version of the story, *Bayezid*, was written in 1735. Magnon had given Bayezid an intriguing wife and daughter; the Handel and Vivaldi renditions included, as well as Tamerlane and Bayezid and his daughter, a prince of Byzantium and a princess of Trebizond (Trabzon) in a passionate and incredible love story. A cycle of paintings in Schloss Eggenberg, near Graz in Austria, translated the theme to a different medium; this was completed in the 1670s shortly before the mighty Ottoman army attacked the Habsburgs in central Europe.³⁴

Prince Süleyman and his followers, who included Bayezid's vezir Çandarlı Ali Pasha, took the strategic decision to leave Anatolia to Tamerlane and assume control of his father's western territories. Like the Ottomans, Tamerlane had his chroniclers, and these too observed certain conventions: concerned lest his failure to pursue Süleyman be interpreted as weakness, Tamerlane's official historian Sharaf al-Din Yazdi wrote that his master exchanged envoys with Süleyman, who acknowledged Tamerlane's suzerainty and in return was accorded a free hand in Rumeli.³⁵ Süleyman began negotiations with the Christian powers of the Balkans, aimed at preempting them from exercising their historical claims to the Rumelian domains of his weakened state which was still, however, the largest in the region. His swift action also prevented his Balkan vassals – Byzantine, Serbian and Latin – from taking as much advantage as the former emirs of Anatolia of the disintegration of the Ottoman realm. Nevertheless, by the terms of a treaty made at Gelibolu in 1403 Prince Süleyman agreed territorial concessions which would have been unthinkable only a few months before. In addition Byzantium was released from its vassal status, as were some Latin enclaves; had the Serbian lords not been at odds with one another, Serbia too might have emerged from vassalage. The south-western shore of the Black Sea and the city of Thessalonica were among the gains made by Emperor Manuel II, who won a further significant concession in Süleyman's agreement to come to his aid in the event of an attack by Tamerlane. With Byzantium's fear of the Ottomans thus eased, Manuel was emboldened to expel the Ottoman merchants based in Constantinople and demolish the mosque recently built there to serve their community.³⁶ Venice and Genoa both obtained favourable trading arrangements in the lands Süleyman controlled.³⁷ According to the Venetian negotiator, Pietro Zeno, Gazi Evrenos Bey was strongly opposed to the surrender by a member of the Ottoman house of lands which had been won by him and his fellow marcher-lords.³⁸

The best-known version of subsequent events is that of an anonymous panegyrist of Prince Mehmed, the ultimate victor in the civil war. After the battle of Ankara Mehmed retired to his base in north-central Anatolia, re-emerging when Tamerlane himself returned eastwards in 1403. Mehmed then defeated Prince İsa in battle south of the Sea of Marmara and entered Bursa which had been in İsa's hands; his forces were subsequently involved in battles with various local lords asserting their regained independence of Ottoman rule. Prince İsa seems also to have fought a battle with Tamerlane's army in Kayseri after which he retreated into north-west Anatolia until killed by Süleyman later in 1403.³⁹ Prince Süleyman's Gelibolu treaty bought him a period of stability in the Balkans. In 1404 he crossed over

to Anatolia and won Bursa and Ankara from Prince Mehmed who retreated to Tokat in north-central Anatolia. Süleyman ruled both in Rumeli and in Anatolia as far as Ankara, and his future as his father's successor seemed assured; indeed, some historians consider him to have been sultan and dub him Süleyman I.

In 1409, however, a new actor appeared on the scene and threatened Süleyman's domains. His younger brother Prince Musa had been released by Tamerlane in 1403 into the safe-keeping of the Emir of Germiyan, and he in turn handed him over to Mehmed. The attack on Süleyman came from a completely unanticipated direction: Musa had sailed from the north Anatolian port of Sinop to Wallachia where he gained a foothold in the region by marrying the daughter of the Wallachian voyvode Mircea. Mircea had transferred to Süleyman his antipathy to Bayezid, and calculated that it would be to his advantage to side with Musa. Musa's campaign in Rumeli was not without setbacks, but by May 1410 he had occupied Süleyman's capital at Edirne and reached Gelibolu, causing Süleyman to return in some haste from Anatolia. Emperor Manuel saw the succession struggle as his salvation, and worked to prolong it: he had regained control of the passages between Anatolia and Rumeli as a result of the 1403 treaty and assisted Süleyman across the Bosphorus. But Süleyman was soon executed near Edirne on Musa's order – while drunk, if an anonymous chronicler is to be believed – and the field was left to Mehmed and Musa.

Prince Musa thus inherited his brother Süleyman's domains in both Rumeli and Anatolia and ruled them uneasily for the next two years. Süleyman's son Orhan had taken refuge in Constantinople and, fearing that he might provide a focus for dissent against him, Musa besieged Constantinople in the autumn of 1411, an effort that came to nothing. His advisers and commanders gradually deserted him, and his brother Prince Mehmed now crossed the Bosphorus with Manuel's assistance and met Musa in battle near Çatalca in Thrace; Mehmed then returned to Anatolia. Though Musa won, his lands in Rumeli were invaded in the north-west by troops of his former ally Stephen Lazarević – who paid the price the following year when Musa retaliated by attacking a number of Serbian strongholds. In 1413 Orhan landed at Thessalonica, probably with the encouragement of Emperor Manuel who hoped to distract Musa from Serbia.⁴⁰ Musa managed to capture Orhan but for some reason released him, and failed to retake Thessalonica.

Neighbouring states saw Prince Musa, with his Wallachian support, as a greater threat than Prince Mehmed. Stephen Lazarević called on Mehmed to join him in a co-ordinated campaign against Musa; Manuel also took Mehmed's part, providing vessels to carry him and his men across once more into Rumeli and supplying troops. By the time that the two armies

met to the south of Sofia, Mehmed's forces included men from the emirate of Dulkadir in south-east Anatolia, thanks to Mehmed's marriage with the emir's daughter; Byzantine troops provided by the Emperor; Serbian, Bosnian and Hungarian troops under the command of Stephen Lazarević; troops from Aydın whose support for Musa had been firm until just before the battle; and Rumelian troops commanded by the marcher-lord Gazi Evrenos Bey. Musa's army attacked strongly in battle, but eventually he was forced to flee. He fell when his horse stumbled and was killed by one of Mehmed's commanders.⁴¹

With Prince Musa's death in 1413 the civil war seemed once again to be over and the succession resolved in favour of Prince Mehmed, known from this time as Sultan Mehmed I. Sultan Mehmed's first concern was to win the allegiance of the various Anatolian emirates that had supported him militarily but had no desire to relinquish the independence they had regained following Tamerlane's victory at Ankara in 1402. Mehmed met with particularly determined resistance from Karaman and also from Cüneyd, emir of Aydın; Cüneyd's stronghold at İzmir was eventually taken with the help of allies who included the Genoese of Chios, Lesbos and Foça (Phokaia) and the Knights Hospitallers of Rhodes. Cüneyd was appointed governor of Nikopol on the Danube, site of Sultan Bayezid's victory against the Crusaders in 1396.⁴² The appointment of former rebels to posts in the service of the state was a leitmotif of Ottoman administrative practice from these early times. The Ottomans found it more politic to conciliate defeated local lords – and, later, overly independent state servants – with a share in the rewards of government than to kill them and risk fomenting further unrest among their partisans.

Within a couple of years Sultan Mehmed had largely recovered the former Ottoman domains in Anatolia and Emperor Manuel found his position weakened accordingly. He could not afford to lose the initiative he had gained during the Ottoman interregnum by aiding one or other of the contenders for the sultanate. The only tool remaining in his hands was Süleyman's son Orhan. In a last desperate attempt to keep the Ottoman house at odds with itself he sent Orhan to Wallachia, whose voyvode Mircea had remained an implacable enemy of Ottoman power in the region. This marked the end of Orhan's usefulness as an alternative focus of Ottoman loyalty, however, for Mehmed hurried to meet him before he had gone very far and blinded him. Then, suddenly and quite unexpectedly in 1415, Mehmed's missing brother Prince Mustafa, or a very credible impostor – he was known as 'False' Mustafa – appeared in Wallachia by way of the Byzantine outpost of Trebizond on the north-east Anatolian coast. Mustafa was reported to have been taken into captivity with his

father and brother Musa in 1402, but his whereabouts during the intervening years remain obscure.⁴³ It is tempting to believe that he was kept prisoner at the Timurid court and that his release by Shah-Rukh, the son and successor of Tamerlane (who had died in 1405), was timed to reignite the Ottoman succession struggle.⁴⁴ In 1416 Shah-Rukh wrote to Mehmed to protest at the elimination of his brothers. Mehmed defiantly proffered the justification that 'One realm cannot shelter two *pādišāhs* . . . the enemies that surround us are always watching for an opportunity.'⁴⁵ Shah-Rukh had himself come to power only after a struggle of more than ten years against other contenders and, like his father, wanted weak states on his periphery.

It seemed that Mehmed's recently-reimposed authority in Rumeli would have to face a challenge led by his brother Mustafa, whose envoys had begun negotiations with Emperor Manuel and with Venice. Mehmed's decision to appoint Cüneyd of Aydın to hold the Danubian frontier against Wallachia proved ill-judged, for his former foe soon defected to Mustafa.⁴⁶ Nevertheless the two were defeated and, when they sought asylum in the Byzantine city of Thessalonica, Emperor Manuel was persuaded to hold them in custody during Mehmed's lifetime.⁴⁷

The appearance of charismatic figures and their ability to attract supporters during times of acute economic and social crisis was as potent a force in Ottoman as in European history. In 1416, the same year that he defeated his brother Mustafa's challenge, Sultan Mehmed was faced with another rebellion against his efforts to govern his Balkan provinces. This uprising was led by Sheikh Bedreddin, an eminent member of the Islamic religious hierarchy who was born of mixed Muslim and Christian parentage in the town of Simavne (Kyprinos), just south-west of Edirne. Sheikh Bedreddin was also a mystic; following theological studies in Konya and Cairo he had gone to Ardabil in Azerbaijan which was under Timurid domination and the home of the mystical Safavid order. Here he found a sympathetic environment for the development of his pantheistic ideas, and especially the doctrine of the 'oneness of being'.

The doctrine of 'oneness of being' sought to eliminate the oppositions which framed life on earth – such as those between religions, and between the privileged and the powerless – which were considered to inhibit the oneness of the individual with God. The struggle for 'oneness' gave the mystic an important role for it was he, rather than the orthodox cleric, who had the wisdom, and therefore the task, to guide man to union with God. This doctrine was potentially highly subversive of evolving Ottoman efforts to establish through conquest a state with Sunni Islam as its religion and their eponymous dynasty at its pinnacle.⁴⁸

In the climate of opposition to Sultan Mehmed Sheikh Bedreddin must have seen an opportunity to preach his creed. In 1415 he abruptly left his exile in Iznik, where he had been sent after the death of Prince Musa under whom he had held the post of chief judge in Edirne, and made his way to Wallachia via Sinop on the Black Sea coast. Sheikh Bedreddin became a figurehead for those, like the supporters of Mustafa and Cüneyd, who were disappointed in Mehmed; the heartland of his support was the 'Deli Orman', the 'Wild Forest' region lying south of the Danube delta. Here, where the internecine struggles of the past years had further exacerbated the dislocation experienced as a result of Ottoman conquest, he found adherents among disaffected marcher-lords and their followers – whose local power was being compromised by the imposition of Ottoman overlordship – as well as among other mystics and peasants alike. The material interests of the marcher-lords and their men had been adversely affected when Mehmed revoked the land-grants Sheikh Bedreddin had made to them on Musa's behalf during his tenure as chief judge.

As Sheikh Bedreddin preached his syncretist message, his disciples Börklüce Mustafa and Torlak Kemal spread the word in western Anatolia to the consternation of the Ottoman authorities. Once tolerant of the practice of Christianity within its own ranks, the government now adopted an assimilative stance, using denigrating language in its decrees to describe those who expressed their grievances in religious terms. By stigmatizing them as 'peasants', 'ignorants' and 'wretches', both the state and its chroniclers branded this and later outbursts of popular discontent as illegitimate and intolerable. These manifestations of popular resistance obliged Mehmed to divert to their suppression resources and energy which he would have hoped to employ more productively elsewhere.

Sheikh Bedreddin's revolt in Rumeli was short-lived: Sultan Mehmed's men soon apprehended him and took him to Serres where he was judged and executed in the market-place, accused of disturbing public order by preaching that property must be communal and that there was no difference between the various religions and their prophets. Sheikh Bedreddin's teachings continued to be influential, however. Until the late sixteenth century and beyond his sectarians were perceived as a threat to the state,⁴⁹ and the doctrines he preached were common currency among anarchic mystical sects throughout the life of the empire. Most notably, they were espoused by the Bektāşi, the dervish order with which the janissaries were associated.

The name of Sheikh Bedreddin lives on in modern Turkey. It is especially familiar to those on the left of the political spectrum thanks to the *Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin*, a long narrative poem by the Turkish communist

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to send his two young sons Yusuf and Mahmud to Constantinople, to be held as hostages by Emperor Manuel II. By this means he hoped to ensure the continuing custody of his brother 'False' Mustafa and thus eliminate the risk of any of the three joining a power struggle to succeed him. In the event, Yusuf and Mahmud were not handed over to Manuel and Mehmed's death precipitated the release of 'False' Mustafa and Cüneyd. Doukas considered that Mehmed's vezir Bayezid Pasha was responsible for the failure to hand over the two boys, insisting 'It is not good or consonant with the Prophet's ordinances that the children of Muslims be nurtured by unbelievers'.⁵¹ With Manuel's assistance Mustafa and Cüneyd landed at Gelibolu in Rumeli, where they were supported by the most prominent marcher-lords of the region, the Evrenosoğulları and Turahanogulları among them. But before they could reach Edirne they were met by an army commanded by Bayezid Pasha. 'False' Mustafa induced Bayezid Pasha's men to desert by revealing the scars he had, it was claimed, received at the battle of Ankara twenty years earlier. Bayezid Pasha was executed and Mustafa occupied Edirne as his capital, minting coinage there in proclamation of his sultanate, as his brothers Süleyman, Musa and Mehmed had before him.⁵² The readiness of the Rumelians to go over to Prince Mustafa rather than accord allegiance to Sultan Mehmed's son and designated heir Murad II was an indication of the continuing unease with which these marcher-warriors viewed Ottoman efforts to impose unified and centralized government on the territories they themselves had conquered as partners of the Ottomans. Mustafa had proved himself their ally by opposing his brother Sultan Mehmed some six years earlier, and many had also been sympathetic to Sheikh Bedreddin's uprising.

Mustafa's next objective was Bursa. Sultan Murad planned to confront him at a point north-west of the city where a bridge crossed the river Nilüfer, and ordered the bridge to be destroyed. The two armies faced one another across the river. Murad led Mustafa to believe that he planned to march around the lake from which the river debouched, but instead he swiftly reconstructed the bridge and caught his uncle unawares. The marcher-lords deserted Mustafa, who fled. Most accounts of his end state that Mustafa was apprehended by Sultan Murad's men north of Edirne as he tried to reach Wallachia early in 1422 and, like Sheikh Bedreddin before him, was hanged as a common criminal which implied that Murad considered him an impostor. Another tradition tells that he reached Wallachia and from there went to Caffa in the Crimea and later took refuge in Byzantine Thessalonica.⁵³ He could not, however, have been certain even of a welcome in Wallachia, let alone the level of support he had received in his previous campaign against his brother Mehmed, for Wallachia was now an Ottoman vassal.

Another Mustafa, Murad's brother 'Little' Mustafa also became the focus of a rival claim to the sultanate. Since the death of their father, 'Little' Mustafa had been in one of the Anatolian states opposed to the Ottomans; in 1422, now thirteen years old, the boy was put at the head of an army and Bursa was besieged. When Murad sent a relieving army, 'Little' Mustafa and his supporters fled to Constantinople. 'Little' Mustafa's claim to the sultanate was soon recognized throughout much of Ottoman Anatolia, however, but thanks to the defection of Mustafa's vezir İlyas Pasha, Murad marched on him in İznik and had the boy strangled after bitter fighting.⁵⁴ Writing almost a century later, the chronicler Mehmed Neşri had İlyas Pasha justify his treachery on the grounds that his paramount concern was the maintenance of public order, and that no sacrifice was too great to attain this end.⁵⁵

Like his father before him, Sultan Murad II began to rebuild his state, a daunting task, and he was well into his reign before he managed to stabilize the Ottoman domains. After the defeat of 'False' Prince Mustafa his fellow rebel Cüneyd of Aydın returned home to discover that his rule had been usurped. Murad had promised Cüneyd and his family safe conduct but then had them murdered, and Aydın became Ottoman once more. Menteşe was re-annexed at this time and, sometime after 1425, Germiyan, giving the Ottomans full control of western Anatolia once more. Karaman remained independent: Murad had no immediate plans to attack it, nor provocation to do so.

The years following Bayezid I's defeat at Ankara in 1402 saw the most tumultuous of all Ottoman succession struggles. The haunting memory of these events later inspired Sultan Murad's son Mehmed II, in the hope that such terrible bloodshed would never be repeated, to sanction fratricide as a means of smoothing the succession to the sultanate, a practice which brought opprobrium upon the Ottoman dynasty in later times. In the absence of contemporary accounts little is known of the path by which Osman and his immediate successors came to the throne. It was perhaps equally bloody: some chroniclers hint that Osman's bid to head the clan on the death of his father Ertuğrul was contested by his uncle Dündar, and that Osman killed him.⁵⁶ Osman's son and heir Orhan had several brothers but the chronicles mention only one, Alaeddin, whose existence is attested by the mosques, bath-house and dervish lodge he built in Bursa.⁵⁷ Orhan is alleged to have offered Alaeddin the leadership of the Ottoman emirate and Alaeddin to have refused, leaving the way open for Orhan to succeed⁵⁸ – thus Orhan's succession to Osman is explained in a seamless manner. The fate of Osman's other sons is unknown. When Orhan died he left

Murad and Halil and possibly another son, Ibrahim; if there was a struggle for the succession, it has likewise been glossed over.⁵⁹ When Bayezid succeeded Sultan Murad I after the latter's death at Kosovo Polje it was reported, as noted earlier, that he killed his brother Yakub.

Although the contemporary Byzantine historian Laonicus Chalcocondylas reports that Sultan Mehmed's intention had been to divide the Ottoman domain, giving Rumeli to Murad and Anatolia to 'Little' Mustafa, from the time of the foundation of their state the Ottomans had adhered to the principle that their domains should be passed on intact to one member of the next generation. They followed Mongol practice, in that succession was not limited to any particular member of the ruling dynasty: the question of who should succeed was a matter for God to determine. The right to rule rested first and foremost on possession of the throne.⁶⁰ Sultan Bayezid fathered many sons who were in their turn prolific, and his grandsons also had claims to the succession; their periodic emergence as pretenders, often with the connivance of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II, fuelled the struggle for the throne. Throughout much of Ottoman history, neither fratricide as a tool of policy, nor the efforts of chroniclers to present the succession of the first Ottoman sultans as trouble-free, were effective in preventing the debilitating power struggles which tended to erupt on the death of a sultan. Moreover, simply to possess the throne was not enough: having established that he was God's chosen ruler, each new sultan needed to gain and keep the support of those who would enable him to exercise his rule – the statesmen and, most importantly, the soldiers of the realm – and seize the treasury which would give him the means to administer and defend Ottoman territory.

The ability of the Ottoman house to attract and retain the loyalty of marcher-lords who were sometimes rivals and sometimes willing partners, and to encourage other states to identify with its cause, depended on its own success – which was not constant. Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Anatolia has recently been described as a place where 'dominating, centralizing family military ascendancy . . . rebellious and factional marcher lords, and . . . fearful, doomed but complacent petty principalities'⁶¹ vied for power, and has been compared to other medieval states – for example, the Anglo-Norman state as it incorporated Wales and Ireland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – in which allegiance to a dynasty or to an individual member thereof dictated the course of political history. Great power politics was another factor influencing the Ottomans and when circumstances demanded even the fiercely anti-Ottoman Karamanids found it politic to agree on a truce when they felt threatened by the stronger Mamluks.

The location of the region where the Ottomans established their state,

bordering the most moribund of the old empires, the Byzantine, brought real advantage. The far-flung territories of the Byzantine Empire – Constantinople, Thessalonica, the Morea, Trebizond – made it strategically weak. Internecine quarrels within and between the Byzantine dynasties of Palaeologus and Cantacuzenus, and Byzantine failure to attract assistance from a Europe which espoused a very different Christian tradition and the interests of whose states were invariably in conflict, made this empire vulnerable to an energetic power which relentlessly challenged its existence. In the Balkans, although the expectations which any group – be they marcher-lords, holy men or peasants – had of individual members of the Ottoman family made for periods of violent strife, broadly speaking the Ottoman dynasty retained the loyalty of those it had attracted during the conquests and successes of the fourteenth century. The Ottomans were able to take advantage of the weak states of the region, and after the end of the independent Serbian kingdom in 1389 few of them questioned Ottoman regional dominance. Moreover, Ottoman incursions into the Balkans were not unwelcome to local populations whom the new regime freed from the onerous obligations imposed by their feudal lords. In Anatolia, however, there was a real alternative to Ottoman suzerainty and here, in the years after his victory at Ankara, Tamerlane's protection allowed the Anatolian emirates to assert their separate identity. For a while, the Ottomans were hardly even first among equals, but the geographical disunity of the emirates and their lack of any common interest beyond antipathy to the Ottomans prevented the emergence of any sustainable challenge to Ottoman expansion.

The respite the Ottoman civil war brought to Venetian, Byzantine and other interests in the region came to an end as Sultan Murad II consolidated his rule. Venice had good reason to fear attacks on its overseas territories from a reconstituted Ottoman state, and was fighting for the survival of its colonies once the civil war ended. The Byzantine despotate of Morea was under threat from the Latin lord Carlo Tocco, an Ottoman vassal whose lands lay in the north-west Peloponnese. Thessalonica, under siege by the Ottomans since 1422, was ceded to Venice in the following year by Despot Andronicus on condition that its Orthodox customs be respected. Thessalonica was a vital hub of commerce and communications, but whatever hopes Venice might have had of its possession were frustrated by the Ottoman blockade. The city was hard to provision and the occupation a burden on Venice's resources. Several times Venice threatened to produce a claimant to the Ottoman throne, but proof of the descent of such claimants from Sultan Bayezid was by all accounts weaker than that for the two Mustafas, 'False' and 'Little'. One pretender, 'a Turk called Ismail', whom

the Venetians held on the island of Euboea (Negroponte), was intended as the focus of a rebellion against Murad in 1424, to divert him from the blockade of their new possession.⁶² The Byzantines were equally desperate: in 1423 John VIII Palaeologus, who had been appointed co-emperor to share the burdens of state with his ailing father, Manuel II, travelled from Constantinople to seek help in the West, but once again to no purpose. In 1424, however, Manuel won some respite by concluding a treaty with Murad by which Byzantium undertook to pay tribute and also hand over some territory on the Black Sea.

Unable to come to terms with the Ottomans, Venice made overtures to Hungary, proposing logistic support if Hungary would invade the Ottoman lands. Judging that they might be willing to join an anti-Ottoman alliance, in 1425 and 1426, respectively, Murad attacked his vassal states of Wallachia and Serbia, putting paid to any hope Venice may have had of help from that quarter. On the death of Stephen Lazarević the following year, King Sigismund of Hungary frustrated Ottoman ambitions in the region by seizing the strategically important fortress of Belgrade, at the Danube-Sava confluence. Murad took the massive stronghold of Golubac, also on the Danube, but some distance to the east. Overlordship of these new acquisitions was formalized in a Hungarian-Ottoman treaty in 1428. Stephen Lazarević had been a reliable Ottoman vassal for some thirty-five years; his death brought Hungarian and Ottoman frontier outposts closer together than ever before.

Though war between Venice and the Ottomans was not officially declared until 1429, the relationship between them had been deteriorating ever since the Venetians' acceptance of Thessalonica from the Byzantines. Only when that city fell to him in 1430 did Murad agree to conclude a treaty with Venice. As soon as he won Thessalonica Murad restrained his troops from wholesale looting and swiftly expelled them from the city. The former inhabitants were resettled, including those who had fled during earlier phases of the siege. Reconstruction of the city was ordered and church property was returned to its owners; only two churches were immediately converted into mosques, an indication that the Muslim population was small at this time, probably consisting only of the garrison. Two years later Murad returned, this time taking over some Christian religious establishments and surveying the resources of the city with a view to facilitating its transformation into an Islamic centre.⁶³

The great power struggle in the Balkans between the Ottomans, Venice and Hungary was Murad's major preoccupation after the fall of Thessalonica. Even before the expiry of the 1428 Hungarian-Ottoman treaty in 1431, Murad had moved to counter Venetian claims in Albania. Ottoman troops

had been invited into Albania in the 1380s during the reign of his namesake Murad I, to help one of the local lords against a Serbian rival; then success in thwarting the latter's ambitions led to the imposition of a degree of Ottoman authority which increased both during Bayezid's reign and subsequently under Mehmed I. Albania was ruled by many lords with conflicting interests, and its incorporation into the Ottoman state was therefore a gradual process. A cadastral survey conducted there in 1432⁶⁴ further strengthened Ottoman control, resistance to which was soon crushed.⁶⁵ The uncertain allegiance of Serbia following the death of Lazarević in 1427 provoked Ottoman attacks in the mid-1430s and the vassaldom of Serbia to the Ottomans rather than to Hungary was formalized through the Serbian despot George Branković's payment of tribute and the marriage of his daughter Mara to Murad.

With the Ottomans so deeply engaged in the Balkans, the emir of Karaman, Ibrahim Bey, saw his opportunity and began to attack their territory in Anatolia. Several years of strife brought Murad some acquisitions in the west of the Karamanid state⁶⁶ but Ottoman resources were unequal to its permanent subjugation at this time. Karaman enjoyed two significant advantages: its geographic location as a buffer between Ottomans and Mamluks meant that it could play one off against the other, while its predominantly tribal, nomadic population was skilful in confounding Ottoman attack in the mountainous terrain. This region, like the Balkans, proved itself the locus of a long-lasting power struggle.

In 1435 Tamerlane's heir Shah-Rukh sent ceremonial robes to the rulers of the various Anatolian states, including the Ottoman sultan, demanding that they wear them as a mark of allegiance. Murad did not feel able to refuse, but apparently did not wear them on official occasions. He fought back with a propaganda campaign of his own, minting coins with the seal of the Kayı tribe of the Oğuz Turks of Central Asia from whom the Ottoman house sought to establish its descent, a dynastic conceit which found acceptance in the east-central Anatolian Turcoman emirate of Dulkadir and among the Karakoyunlu, who unlike the Karamanids and the Akkoyunlu were partisans of the Ottomans. Like the other anti-Ottoman dynasties with strategic interests in eastern Anatolia, however, Shah-Rukh had no regard for this supposed link to the Oğuz tribe, viewing the Ottomans as upstarts.⁶⁷

The balance of power in the Balkans occupied Murad for the remainder of his reign. Ottoman policy became more resolute, aimed at securing the Danube-Sava line west of Belgrade against Hungary by incorporating the long-time vassal state of Serbia into the Ottoman realm. That Serbia's despot George Branković was Murad's brother-in-law counted for little against the imperative of politics. A punitive invasion through the Ottoman vassal

state of Wallachia into the Hungarian province of Transylvania was followed in 1438 and 1439 by campaigns against Serbia in which the recently-built Danubian fortress of Smederevo fell to Murad. The key stronghold of Belgrade, his next target, failed to succumb to a six-month siege in 1440.

John VIII Palaeologus had been emperor in Constantinople since Manuel II's death in 1425. In 1437, he pressed for renewed consideration of the thorny issue of church union at the Council of Ferrara which had been called for the purpose. Repeatedly the centuries-old schism between Catholic and Orthodox had served as an excuse for foot-dragging among the Christian states of Europe when the Byzantines begged for support. Since Ottoman resurgence after the reconquest of Thessalonica not only put his own domains at risk but also presented a more direct threat to Venice and Hungary, John hoped the Catholics would look favourably on his proposal for union. Among the most critical theological issues dividing the two Churches were the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the service of Communion, the Latin doctrine of purgatory, not accepted by the Orthodox, and the matter of papal supremacy. In July 1439, after a year and a half of intermittent debate and the removal of the Council to Florence after plague struck Ferrara, the 375-year schism was brought to an end with the signing of a document of union.

At first it appeared that John had miscalculated. Union with Rome brought upon his head the wrath of the Orthodox establishment, and of most of the Byzantine population. It even provoked a joint attack on Constantinople by his brother Demetrius, despot of Mesembria (Nesebŭr) on the western Black Sea coast, and a Turkish force. Further afield, Bishop Isidore of Kiev (Kyiv), who had been made a cardinal by the Pope, was deposed and arrested when he visited Moscow, and had to flee to Italy. The patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch (Antakya) disowned the union. The Orthodox world was divided against itself, but as far as John was concerned his bold action was paying off, because the Pope was mobilizing support for the promised crusade against the Ottomans.

There was optimism in Europe that success would this time attend a united effort to contain the Ottomans. The potential gains were significant – Hungary would acquire territory in the Balkans, Serbia would regain its independence, the threat to Venice in the Aegean and Adriatic would disappear, and Constantinople would survive – and the omens were favourable. The capable military commander John Hunyadi, voyvode of Transylvania, held his position against two Ottoman attacks through Wallachia before being driven back by the Ottomans in the snowy Zlatitsa pass, east of Sofia, in the winter of 1443–4. The incipient anti-Ottoman revolt in northern

Albania of 'Scanderbeg'. Iskender Bey – who came of a local Christian warlord family and had been brought up a Muslim at Murad's court – and the extension of Byzantine authority in central Greece by John VIII's brother Constantine, despot of the Morea and based at Mistras, were further straws in the wind. Constantine's especial triumph was the rebuilding by spring 1444 of the Hexamilion wall spanning the Corinth isthmus, demolished in 1431 by Turkish attackers.⁶⁸ Concern at the momentum produced by the ending of the Christian schism focused Ottoman minds on the very real possibility that the crippling blow dealt their state by Tamerlane might be repeated through the united efforts of the anti-Ottoman powers of the West.

However, the interests of the central European powers – Hungary and Poland, now united under the young king Wladyslaw I and III, and Serbia, under Despot George Branković – proved to be at odds with those of the Latins of the Mediterranean. For the Latins the crusading ideal was a continuing obsession, their attitude little different now from what it had been in 1396, when French insistence on taking over the lead from the more experienced troops of King Sigismund of Hungary had been a significant element in the débâcle at Nikopol. The painful and disorderly retreat of the allied Hungarian army in the campaign of 1443–4 was another bitter experience which caused the central European neighbours of the Ottomans to question whether they really could hope to make substantial gains, or whether a negotiated balance of power might not be more to their advantage. Through contacts facilitated by the Sultan's Serbian wife Mara, the leaders Wladyslaw of Hungary-Poland, John Hunyadi of Transylvania and George Branković of Serbia sent an embassy to Murad in Edirne where, on 12 June 1444, a ten-year truce was agreed. Around this time Murad called his young son Mehmed to Edirne from the west Anatolian city of Manisa, former capital of the Saruhan emirate, where he was prince-governor of the province of Saruhan. Bemused, Murad's commanders warned him of the threat from the crusading Venetian fleet – which by mid-July was off the Peloponnese⁶⁹ – but to the amazement of all, he announced that he was giving up the throne.⁷⁰ The abdication of a sultan was unprecedented in Ottoman history. Murad II's motive for taking this step at the age of only 41 is a matter for speculation. He had suffered tribulations in recent months – for instance, the sudden death of his eldest and dearest son Alaeddin, next to whose tomb in Bursa he ordered that he himself be buried.⁷¹ Perhaps, after an active reign of more than twenty years, he was simply tired.

Not unnaturally, Murad's withdrawal and the accession of his twelve-year-old son were interpreted by the West as a sign of weakness they could

exploit. When the Edirne truce was confirmed by Wladyslaw, Hunyadi and Branković in Hungary in August, Wladyslaw and Hunyadi swore false oaths, having been absolved in advance by the papal legate to the kingdoms of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini.⁷² Between 18 and 22 September 1444 the crusading Hungarian army crossed the Danube on its eastward march and soon reached Varna on the Black Sea coast. Only George Branković had declined to take part in the advance, Serbia having been promised independence by Murad, and the return of the Danube fortresses of Smederevo and Golubac. In Edirne, a fortnight's march from Varna, fear was palpable. It was less than a year since the Hungarian army had last advanced through the Balkans and into the river valleys leading to the city. Trenches were dug to protect the city and its walls were repaired. The panic was exacerbated by dervishes of an ascetic sect of Iranian origin, the Hurufi, whose doctrines had much in common with the teachings of the heretical Sheikh Bedreddin; public buildings and private houses alike were destroyed in the commotion that accompanied the suppression of their disturbances.⁷³ To add to the turmoil, the Byzantine emperor John VIII released another pretender to the Ottoman throne. Finding no support in Thrace he turned north to the 'Wild Forest', south of the Danube delta, seat of Sheikh Bedreddin's revolt against Sultan Mehmed I; troops were sent against him from Edirne but he fled back towards Constantinople.⁷⁴

When Murad appointed Mehmed as sultan in his place, he ordered his trusted vezir Çandarlı Halil Pasha to remain in Edirne with him. Members of the Çandarlı family had been first ministers of the Ottoman house almost without interruption since the reign of Murad I; this intimacy had survived both the Timurid catastrophe and the bitter civil war, and Çandarlı Halil had succeeded his father Çandarlı İbrahim Pasha in the mid-1430s. Çandarlı Halil thought Mehmed too young, and those around him unreliable. Men such as Zaganos Mehmed Pasha, Saruca Pasha, and the talented commander Şihabeddin Şahin Pasha were 'professional Ottomans'. Unlike marcher-lords such as the Evrenosoğulları or the old Muslim families of Anatolia such as the Çandarlı, they belonged to the new caste of Christian-born statesmen who had come to prominence during Murad's reign, whether Byzantine renegades or men taken in the youth-levy and converted to Islam. Sheikh Bedreddin's revolt had revealed the continuing fragility of the Ottoman state and demonstrated to Murad that the faith which he espoused must become its cornerstone. He had therefore expanded the youth-levy as a reliable source of loyal military manpower whose converted recruits professed the religion of his dynasty and his court.

Çandarlı Halil Pasha's pre-eminent position engendered much jealousy

among the clique around Mehmed, who envisaged an Ottoman state different in character from the stable balance of power in Anatolia and Rumeli towards which Murad and his counsellor had been cautiously directing it. Çandarlı Halil was reluctant to allow the enthusiastic young sultan to lead an army against the crusaders and, alarmed at the civil unrest in Edirne, felt that he had only one option – to recall Murad who had been in Manisa. Making his way from Anatolia to Edirne, Murad did not enter the city but led his army directly to the front against the Hungarians. The great battle of Varna on the Rumelian coast of the Black Sea took place on 10 November. The fleet bringing the crusaders from the West had not yet reached Constantinople, but although this left the armies of Wladyslaw of Hungary-Poland and Hunyadi of Transylvania to fight the Ottomans alone, things went badly for the Ottoman army at first. Towards evening, however, King Wladyslaw was killed, and his troops fled. The satisfactory outcome of this encounter was due as much to the effectiveness of Mehmed's commander Şihabeddin Şahin Pasha in closing the Balkan passes leading to the plain of Thrace to the enemy as to Murad's generalship. Nor was this the end: the next year a crusader fleet attacked Ottoman positions on the Danube in alliance with Hunyadi and the Voynode of Wallachia, but again Şihabeddin Şahin Pasha led a successful defence.

During the early months of his first sultanate Mehmed had asserted his independence of his father by taking the unprecedented step of debasing the Ottoman currency, the silver asper, by more than 10 per cent.⁷⁵ A greater number of coins could thus be minted to meet the ever-increasing costs of defending and administering the Ottoman territory; but while debasement produced income for the treasury it had the undesirable effect of causing hardship to salaried state servants who received the same number of coins as before but of a lower silver content and therefore of lower worth in real terms. Murad withdrew again to Manisa after the victory at Varna but his second attempt at retirement lasted only a little longer than the first. The janissaries were the most vociferous of those affected by the debasement and in 1446 an insurrection broke out in Edirne provoked, probably, by Mehmed's meddling with the coinage. Çandarlı Halil Pasha again called Murad back to Thrace. Şihabeddin Şahin Pasha became the scapegoat and focus of janissary wrath and took refuge in the palace as the restored Sultan ordered the troublemakers to be hunted down. After this unequivocal assertion of his authority, Murad promised the janissaries salary increases as recompense for the financial distress they had suffered.⁷⁶

The degree of independence Mehmed enjoyed while his father was in Manisa vexed contemporary commentators as much as modern historians. Some, both at home and abroad, considered that Mehmed ruled over

Rumeli, while his father was sultan in Anatolia. The Karamanids feared that Mehmed would break a treaty they had agreed with Murad in 1444, for all acts of a previous sultan had to be renewed on the accession of a new one. Although Mehmed had been de jure sultan and tried to exert his independence of his father, with schemes such as that for the conquest of Constantinople at the earliest opportunity or the debasement of the currency, his real power was limited thanks to Çandarlı Halil Pasha's success in restraining his and his clique's wilder fantasies, albeit at the cost of alienating them. Çandarlı Halil may even have encouraged the janissary uprising in order to have a reason to recall Murad; indeed, the removal of Mehmed was one of the demands which the protestors voiced. When the janissaries threatened to join the Ottoman pretender released by John VIII in 1444, who was now back in Constantinople, the demonstration was clearly getting out of hand.⁷⁷

Mehmed accepted his removal from power and forced return to Manisa with bad grace. As a gesture of defiance against his father he had coins struck in his own name in a west Anatolian mint and attacked Venetian outposts in the Aegean in contravention of the truce. Çandarlı Halil having remained in Edirne with Murad,⁷⁸ in Anatolia there was no similarly eminent elder statesman to oversee Mehmed's activities.

Sultan Murad turned to the pressing matter of securing his borders. The Emperor's brother Constantine, despot of the Morea, had recently made gains in Attica at the expense of both local Latin lords and the Ottomans. Murad led his army south, and with his commander Turahan breached and destroyed the supposedly impregnable Hexamilion wall so recently rebuilt by Constantine. Next he attempted the reconquest of Albania, where Scanderbeg was encouraging rebellion against Ottoman authority. The Ottomans' most significant triumph came in 1448 when they routed an army mainly composed of Hungarians and Wallachians under the command of the indefatigable John Hunyadi in a second battle at Kosovo Polje, where Hunyadi's Wallachian allies deserted and he himself fled.

Emperor John VIII died in 1448 to be succeeded by his brother Constantine, who ruled from 1449 as Constantine XI. In 1451 Murad died, and his son assumed the full powers of the sultanate as Mehmed II. He and his counsellors now looked for a great victory to reaffirm their power and independence.

THE OTTOMANS HAD ample strategic reason for coveting Constantinople, the seat of the Eastern Roman Empire since the fourth century. Byzantine control of the Bosphorus had on several occasions caused serious logistic problems for sultans – or would-be sultans – and their armies criss-crossing their domains, between Rumeli and Anatolia. Moreover, the costs of conquest and administration of the territories coming under Ottoman rule were mounting, and control of the profits from taxation of the rich trade between the Black Sea basin and the Mediterranean and Europe would go far towards paying for the Ottoman future. The union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in 1439 had serious repercussions for the Ottomans because it increased the possibility of future crusades and raised again the spectre of Latin influence in Constantinople, anathema to Ottomans and Orthodox alike. Possession of Constantinople had also a compelling symbolic value – the confirmation of empire and the victory of faith. The city featured in both sacred and secular Muslim legend, and conquest by the Ottomans would fulfil a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, a version of which they loved to quote: 'One day Constantinople will certainly be conquered. A good emir and a good army will be able to accomplish this.' Constantinople was also the 'Red Apple' – an expression the Ottomans used to describe their ultimate aspiration. By striking at the Byzantine imperial city, Sultan Mehmed II aimed to pluck an alien presence from the heart of his realm.

Before he could attempt to besiege Constantinople, following his accession in 1451, Mehmed had to secure his borders. He renewed his father's treaty with George Branković of Serbia and concluded a three-year treaty with John Hunyadi, regent in Hungary. He pre-empted a possible attack from Venice by confirming a treaty made by his father in 1446.² He also had to exert constant vigilance to retain his territories in Anatolia since the former emirates of Aydın, Menteşe and Germiyan were preparing to reassert their independence and fight their way free of Ottoman domination. Although technically an Ottoman vassal, the emirate of Karaman protected

various claimants to these lands and its armies moved to retake territory lost to Sultan Murad II. Learning that Mehmed intended to confront this challenge, Ibrahim, the ruler of Karaman – who was married to Mehmed's aunt – sued for peace.

Mehmed had murdered his sole surviving brother on their father's death; his only known male relative and potential rival remaining was a pretender in Constantinople purporting to be his uncle Orhan. Memories of the chaos caused by the appearance of pretenders was still fresh in Ottoman minds and he had therefore agreed to pay the expenses of Orhan's continuing custody. While Mehmed was campaigning against Karaman Emperor Constantine XI sent envoys to ask for more money for Orhan's upkeep and hinted that he might release him from custody if it was not forthcoming. Mehmed bided his time in reacting to this provocation which he considered to be in breach of a treaty granted to Constantine soon after the Emperor's accession.³

Yet soon enough Mehmed, undeterred by the knowledge that his great-grandfather Bayezid I had failed to reduce Constantinople even after an eight-year siege, embarked upon the conquest of which he had dreamed since his first taste of sultanic authority as an adolescent in his father's capital of Edirne in 1444–6.⁴ The preliminaries to the siege and its course are among the most familiar of historical narratives. For western contemporaries, the exchange of Christian rule for Muslim in Constantinople was described as 'the Fall'. For the Ottomans, it was 'the Conquest'.

Sultan Mehmed's was the thirteenth Muslim attempt to take the city from the Byzantines, the first having been an Arab siege around 650 CE.⁵ He prepared meticulously: his passage across the Bosphorus was secured with the rapid construction in 1451–2 of the fortress of Boğazkesen, 'Cutter of the Strait', some five kilometres north of the walls of Constantinople. Today known as Rumeli Hisarı, this fortress stands opposite one built by Sultan Bayezid I on the Anatolian shore when he tried to take the city. Like Bayezid's fortress, Boğazkesen was planned to serve as a forward logistical base for the siege and a salient from which to cut off grain supplies coming south from the Black Sea basin. It was very modern by contemporary standards of fortification, its thick walls well able to resist the technological advances of the gunpowder age.⁶ Its towers were named after, and probably paid for by, Mehmed's counsellors from his Edirne days: Zaganos Mehmed, Saruca and Çandarlı Halil Pashas.

As the beleaguered inhabitants of Constantinople watched what they had long feared slowly become reality, the Emperor, as on countless occasions in the past, sent urgent calls for help to possible allies in the West. Commerical rivalry between Genoa and Venice meant that neither of these

states was willing to bear a greater share of the burden of defending Constantinople than the other. Genoa sent troops under the able commander Giovanni Giustiniani Longo, and Constantine appointed him to command his forces along the landward stretch of the city wall; Venice rented the Emperor naval support. In desperation, Constantine ceded his western Black Sea coastal city of Nesebŭr to John Hunyadi and the northern Aegean island of Lemnos to King Alfonso of Aragon and Naples, but neither was prepared to aid the Byzantines in the coming struggle. Possible assistance from Constantine's brothers, joint despots Demetrios and Thomas in Mistras, was ruled out by Turahan Pasha's aggressive campaign into the Peloponnese in the autumn of 1452. Yet despite official indifference, many volunteers came to share the defence of Constantinople with the Byzantines.

The price Pope Nicholas V demanded for his help was the Emperor's pledge that the Eastern Church would be more resolute in its union with Rome: he sent two envoys, Cardinal Isidore, formerly of Kiev, and Archbishop Leonard of Chios, who celebrated a Mass in Hagia Sophia at which Constantine swore to the union. But if the Emperor had finally concluded that to move towards effecting the union of the two Churches was a necessary first step before he could even hope for help from the Pope – a step which could be reconsidered at leisure once the immediate danger facing the remnants of his territories was over – others, despite the life-and-death situation they faced, were unwilling to compromise their faith, and there was rioting in the streets of Constantinople. The figurehead of this latter group was the monk George Scholarius, or Gennadios, who was more afraid of divine retribution than of Ottoman conquest.* Such internal dissension was disastrous for the resolve of the populace.⁷

Once the fortress of Boğazkesen had been completed, Sultan Mehmed returned to Edirne to oversee final preparations for the siege, then marched on Constantinople. His army numbered some 160,000 men according to the Venetian merchant Niccolò Barbaro, who was present at the siege. The Byzantine statesman George Sphrantzes estimated the defenders at fewer than five thousand plus the few thousand Latins who came to the aid of the city. Sultan Mehmed came before the walls on 5 April 1453 and, with the help of his navy, surrounded Constantinople on all sides except along the Golden Horn where a boom had been laid to deny the Ottoman navy entry. Unrelenting Ottoman bombardment rent the walls on the landward side: within, Latins and Greeks were at odds over who should man the breaches.

* Gennadios was appointed patriarch, spiritual leader of the Orthodox community, after the city fell to Sultan Mehmed.

Ottoman mining operations were met by the defenders with counter-mines. Skirmishes continued on land and sea until 29 May when what proved to be the final assault on the ruined land-walls began three hours before daybreak. The third wave of the assault succeeded. With his janissaries the Sultan entered a barbican, only to be temporarily driven back before more cannon-fire opened a large breach, through which the victorious Ottoman troops flooded into the city.

The historian and administrator Tursun Bey provides the sole detailed contemporary account of the siege in the Ottoman language:

Once the [cloud of] smoke of Greek fire and the soul of the Fire-worshipping [i.e., infidel] Prince had descended over the castle 'as though a shadow', the import was manifest: the devout Sultan of good fortune had, as it were, 'suspended the mountain'* over this people of polytheism and destruction like the Lord God himself. Thus, both from within and without, [the shot of] the cannons and muskets and falconets and small arrows and arrows and crossbows spewed and flung out a profusion of drops of Pharaonic-seeming perspiration as in the rains of April – like a messenger of the prayers of the righteous – and a veritable precipitation and downpouring of calamities from the heavens as decreed by God. And, from the furthest reaches below to the top-most parts, and from the upper heights down to ground level, hand-to-hand combat and charging was being joined with a clashing and plunging of arms and hooked pikes and halberds in the breaches amidst the ruin wrought by the cannon.

On the outside the Champions of Islam and on the inside the wayward ones, pike to pike in true combat, hand-to-hand;

Now advancing now feinting, guns [firing] and arms drawn,
Countless heads were severed from their trunks;

Expelling the smoke of the Greek fire, a veritable cloud
of sparks was rained on the Champions of Islam by the infidels;

Ramming into the castle walls, the trenches in this manner,
They set off the Greek fire, the enemies;

[In turn] they [i.e. the Ottoman soldiers] presented to the bastion their hooked pikes,

Drawn, they were knocking to the ground the engaged warriors;

As if struck in the deepest bedrock by the digging of a tunnel
It seemed that in places the castle had been pierced from below.

* Both quotations are from the *Koran* 7:171.

By the early part of the forenoon, the frenzy of the fiery tumult and the due of strife had died away.*

European and Byzantine accounts of the siege alike dwell on the damage measures taken by Sultan Mehmed to achieve his aim: the huge cannon made for him by a renegade Hungarian cannon-founder in Edirne; the building of a siege-tower higher than the walls of the city, the dragging of his galleys uphill from the Bosphorus shore near the present-day palace of Dolmabahçe, and down into the Golden Horn to avoid the boom land across its mouth, and the construction of a pontoon bridge across the harbour from Galata to Constantinople which enabled the Ottoman forces to attack the walls on that side of the city and surround it completely.

For the Ottomans, the part played by the Sultan's spiritual guide, the mystic Sheikh Akşemseddin, was the most significant contribution to the final outcome. The Ottomans lost many troops in a confrontation in which four grain ships – three Genoese and one Byzantine – managed to run the Ottoman blockade and convey their load into the Golden Horn. Following this reverse, Akşemseddin wrote to the Sultan of the divine signs he had seen prophesying victory, which soothed Mehmed's despair and raised the morale of the besieging army.⁹

Fifty-four days after beginning his assault, Sultan Mehmed entered a city destroyed by siege and devastated by looting. Emperor Constantine was nowhere in evidence. Most fifteenth-century chroniclers, both eastern and western, agree that he was killed during the fighting, but because the whereabouts of his corpse was (and remains) unknown, legends grew up to explain its fate and various sites in the city were considered to be his tomb.¹⁰ The task of reconstruction which faced the Ottomans was daunting. The historian Doukas reports that Sultan Mehmed summoned the Byzantine statesman Grand Duke Lucas Notaras and demanded to know why the Emperor had not surrendered the city to him, thereby preventing the damage and destruction of its fabric.¹¹

The first Friday prayer after the Conquest, conducted by Sheikh Akşemseddin,¹² took place in the basilica of Hagia Sophia, Emperor Justinian's imperial church, which had been turned into a mosque. Sultan Mehmed purportedly first walked into Hagia Sophia in the company of

* Although the Ottomans seem to have adopted gunpowder technology before the end of the fourteenth century – the use of both arquebus and cannon at Bayezid I's siege of Constantinople is attested – it was not until the mid-fifteenth century, and the conquest of that city by Mehmed II, that cannon rather than blockade reduced a fortress (Agosman 'Ottoman Artillery' 24–5).

Tursun Bey, who saw and recorded the awe and wonder inspired in him by the interior. Transformation of the Christian Byzantine church into an Islamic Ottoman mosque required only the removal of the paraphernalia of Christian ritual – crosses and bells – and their replacement with the furniture of Muslim worship – a prayer niche, a pulpit and minarets. Later Mehmed also added a theological college to the complex. The Sultan's banners carried at the siege were displayed to commemorate his great victory, while prayer carpets supposedly belonging to the Prophet Muhammad re-defined the religious character of the church.¹³ The nineteenth-century chronicler Ahmed Lutfi Efendi states that Mehmed ordered the preservation of the representations of 'angel's faces' in Hagia Sophia,¹⁴ and research has demonstrated that such sacred mosaics as the Pantocrator on the main dome remained on view until the reign of Sultan Ahmed I in the early seventeenth century, when they were painted over during a period of intolerance towards figural representation. Other figural mosaics not visible from the central prayer space remained uncovered until the early eighteenth century.¹⁵ The Ottomans did not even change the name of the building, but merely Turkicized it to 'Ayasofya'.

Standing outside Ayasofya, atop a column, was a colossal statue of Emperor Justinian on horseback with a golden orb in his hand, set up in 543 CE.¹⁶ Byzantines regarded the statue as a talisman whose destruction would presage the end of Byzantium. Like many travellers – including Johann Schiltberger, who spent three months in Constantinople in 1426 on his journey home after many years in captivity in the east – the Ottomans saw the orb as a representation of the 'Red Apple'¹⁷ and within three years of the Conquest the statue was removed, a symbolic act against any return of the defeated imperial power. Living in Istanbul in the mid-1540s the French humanist Pierre Gilles saw what remained of the statue within the precincts of Topkapı Palace: 'Among the fragments were the Leg of Justinian, which exceeded my Height, and his Nose, which was over nine Inches long. I dared not measure the Horses' Legs as they lay on the Ground but privately measured one of the Hoofs and found it to be nine Inches in Height.'¹⁸

Mehmed's re-creation of Byzantine Constantinople as Ottoman Istanbul did not require the destruction of all traces of former times, however. Rather, he sought to imbue the past with new meaning by converting Byzantine buildings, both sacred and secular, to new functions. Hagia Sophia was one of six churches converted into mosques after the Conquest.¹⁹ This preservation of much that was redolent of the infidel past of the city demanded justification, however, and Mehmed subsequently commissioned a mythic history of the emperors – Solomon, Constantine and Justinian – who had built and rebuilt the city. In this text, or texts – for there were

numerous versions, written at different dates – the Islamic present was viewed as having been ordained through the prophetic tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and reinforced through the 'discovery' by Sheikh Akşemseddin of the tomb of Ayyub Ansari, a companion of the Prophet who had taken part in and died during an unsuccessful Arab siege of Constantinople in 668 CE. This miracle gave Sultan Mehmed's conquest the religious legitimacy he sought.²⁰

Mehmed stamped his mark on the fabric of the city with major building projects appropriate to the Islamic way of life. Great importance was attached, for example, to the construction of a fitting tomb for Ayyub Ansari within the courtyard of a mosque built at the site where his grave was said to have been found, outside the city walls at the head of the Golden Horn in the quarter called, in its Turkicized version, Eyüp.²¹ In 1457–8 the fortress of Yedikule ('Seven Towers') was built at the entrance into the city known to the Byzantines as the Porta Aurea, the 'Golden Gate', where the land-walls run down to the Sea of Marmara. This was the gate through which the Via Egnatia, the road from Rome, capital of the Western Roman Empire, had entered Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. At first Yedikule housed errant Ottoman dignitaries, and from the late sixteenth century became infamous as the prison of foreign envoys.²² Mehmed also ordered a palace to be built in the centre of the city on the site of the Byzantine Forum Tauri, where Bayezid Square and Istanbul University stand today. Like Yedikule, the palace was completed in 1458. The construction of the nucleus of the rambling complex today known as the Covered (or Grand) Bazaar began in 1460–61; part of the rent from its shops paid for the upkeep of Ayasofya.²³

Orders for the building of two further structures signalled that Istanbul was to replace Edirne as the Ottoman imperial capital and at the same time expressed Sultan Mehmed's claims as inheritor of an imperial tradition and as the pre-eminent Muslim ruler. On the prominent site of the ancient Byzantine acropolis in 1459 was laid the first stone of a splendid palace to supersede that recently completed in the Forum Tauri; the latter now became known as the 'Old Palace'.²⁴ In 1463 the foundation stone of a monumental mosque complex bearing the Sultan's name was laid.

Topkapı Palace, or the 'New Palace', as the Ottomans also called it until the nineteenth century, is surrounded by a high wall and comprises three large courtyards, each with its own monumental gate, and outer gardens in which are several free-standing pavilions. The first two courtyards were for

* The neighbourhood is still a place of pilgrimage, but Ayyub Ansari's mosque and tomb have been much altered over the centuries.

the public ceremonies and rituals of the court, while beyond the third gate was a private zone reserved for the sultan and his household. The plan of the palace resembles that of an Ottoman military encampment, with the sultan's inner sanctum at the core of a multiplicity of other structures arranged according to institutional function and hierarchy. This layout, very different from contemporary western palaces, expressed through architecture the sultan's separation from his subjects. Despite various rebuilding programmes over the centuries, the palace complex preserves essentially the same form today.²⁵

His palace provided Sultan Mehmed with seclusion. Here he cultivated an aura of mystery and power, which regulations issued towards the end of his reign were designed to enhance. The new rules ensured that sultans would thereafter be less visible to their people than Mehmed's forebears, appearing in public – even before their courtiers – on fewer occasions.²⁶ These rules constituted a manual for court protocol, stipulating hierarchy and precedence among the sultan's statesmen and officials, the titles by which they should be addressed, the order in which they would kiss the sultan's hand on religious festivals. There was no provision for the sultan to appear in public: he was to be hidden behind a curtain from the gaze of his statesmen when they met, four times a week, to present petitions to him.²⁷ For the next century, sultans appeared before their court only on two annual religious holidays.²⁸

Sultan Mehmed embellished his new buildings in a variety of styles which reflected his subsequent conquests. The two-storey Tiled pavilion was built in the palace grounds to commemorate a successful outcome to a campaign in eastern Anatolia following the death in 1464 of the Karamanid ruler Ibrahim Bey, and in particular the advantage gained by the Ottomans over the Akkoyunlu ruler, Uzun ('Tall') Hasan. Craftsmen from Karaman who settled in Istanbul after the campaign were responsible for its decoration, and its splendour inspired many florid poems.^{*29}

Mehmed's mosque complex was built on a hilltop site in the quarter to the west of the Golden Horn known as Fatih ('the Conqueror') in his honour. The Church of the Holy Apostles, the burial site of generations of Byzantine emperors, was demolished to make way for it. The mosque was situated in a courtyard on the north and south sides of which were ranged eight theological colleges, the four in the north named for the Black Sea, those in the south for the Mediterranean, in Turkish Ak Deniz ('White Sea'). There were also a hospice, a dervish lodge and a caravansaray, and Mehmed built a market, a bath-house and many shops whose rents would

* Today the Tiled pavilion stands divorced from its original context, opposite the nineteenth-century bulk of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum and no longer within the gardens of the palace.

provide for the upkeep of these institutions and contribute financial support to their charitable functions. Intended to rival Ayasofya, the main dome of the mosque at the heart of Mehmed's complex was likewise supported by half-domes which raised it high above the prayer hall beneath. As fate would have it, the architect of Mehmed's mosque was over-ambitious in his attempts to surpass Ayasofya, for the building proved to be poorly-constructed, and legend maintains that he was executed.³⁰ This mosque complex was completed in 1470 and became the prototype for such complexes of the Ottoman 'classical age' in the following century.*

Mehmed set about re-peopling Constantinople. People of all religions were attracted by favourable taxation and the opportunities for a better life promised by the revitalized metropolis. When tax and other inducements proved inadequate attractions the Ottomans had no qualms about uprooting and resettling their subjects if it suited their economic or political aims, and on no occasion was resettlement used to greater effect than in post-Conquest Istanbul. Whole communities – Muslims, Jews, and Armenian, Greek and Latin Christians – were forcibly brought to the city over the succeeding years. In keeping with the pattern of Ottoman conquest thus far, Muslim deportees came exclusively from west and central Anatolia, and from Thrace, while Christians and Jews came from across Anatolia and the Balkans; the Latin Christians were a discrete group, transported from the former Genoese colony of Caffa in the Crimea when it was annexed in 1475.³¹ Former Greek residents of Byzantine Constantinople were offered houses and land to encourage them to return.³² The number of Muslims in the city was increased by deporting Muslims from other parts of the state rather than by converting existing Christians or Jews. At upwards of 75,000 souls by the end of Mehmed's reign,³³ the population of Constantinople was half as large again as it had been when the devastated city became his in 1453.

From 1459, Sultan Mehmed adopted a highly effective way of altering the physical appearance of Istanbul so that observers would at once be aware that they were in an Islamic city. In addition to the obvious new landmarks such as his own mosque and palace and the minarets with which he embellished Ayasofya, he ordered his statesmen to found new neighbourhoods, each to be built around a mosque complex which would provide Muslim immigrants to the city with the infrastructure to order their new lives. Besides a mosque these complexes, like his own, included a variety of other structures – perhaps a school, a theological college, a public kitchen, a bath-house, a caravansaray or a mausoleum for the founder – a mix of charitable institutions and the

* The dome finally collapsed in a devastating earthquake in 1766, when a major rebuilding programme was undertaken; the mosque we see today dates from this time.

commercial institutions necessary to provide revenue for their upkeep.³⁴ Examples are those founded by Mahmud Pasha Angelović (a former Byzantine Serbian noble, who was twice appointed grand vezir), which lies just outside the Covered Bazaar on the slope that falls away to the Golden Horn, and by Mehmed's favourite Has Murad Pasha, a convert of the Palaeologan dynasty, in Aksaray, near where Istanbul University stands today. The practice of establishing new neighbourhoods in this way continued apace in the reign of Mehmed's son and successor Bayezid II, and beyond.³⁵ New immigrants to Istanbul often gave to their new urban neighbourhood the name of the area from which they came. The quarter near Mehmed II's mosque where arrivals from Karaman settled is still called Karaman Pazarı; the neighbourhood of Aksaray recalls the area of central Anatolia whence settlers came following Ottoman annexation of the Karamanid emirate.

Two days after Constantinople fell, the Genoese colony of Galata across the Golden Horn from Istanbul surrendered, hoping to preserve the independence it had enjoyed in Byzantine times and which Mehmed had guaranteed. But Mehmed changed his mind once the city was his, and although the colony was granted certain privileges its people, like other non-Muslim subjects of the Ottomans (as of other Islamic states), became subject to a poll-tax. In justification of his change of policy Mehmed reminded the Galatans that some among their number had fought on the side of the Byzantine defenders during the siege of Constantinople.³⁶ He also ordered the Galata Tower to be reduced in height by seven and a half metres to make it less visible a sign of alien presence.³⁷

The city's Byzantine name, rendered in Turkish as Kostantiniyye, continued to be used alongside the newer 'Istanbul'.^{*} Istanbul was punningly rendered as 'İslambol', 'abounding with Islam', and also called Âsitâne-i Saâdet, the 'Threshold of Felicity', or Dersaâdet, the 'Abode of Felicity', among other names. Istanbul was only adopted as the city's official name in 1930 and the transition immortalized in the song:

*Istanbul was Constantinople
Now it's Istanbul not Constantinople
Been a long time gone
Old Constantinople still has Turkish delight
On a moonlight night
Ev'ry gal in Constantinople
Is a Miss-stanbul, not Constantinople*

^{*} Istanbul is seemingly derived from classical Greek *eis tin polin* ('to the city'), which was then spoken in colloquial Greek as *stin poli*, signifying both 'to the city' and 'in the city' (that is, within the walled city), the latter meaning being the most relevant as indicating the 'downtown' area, rather than the suburbs.

*So if you've a date in Constantinople
 She'll be waiting in Istanbul
 Istanbul!!
 Even old New York was once New Amsterdam
 Why they changed it, I can't say
 (People just liked it better that way)
 Take me back to Constantinople
 No, you can't go back to Constantinople
 Now it's Istanbul, not Constantinople
 Why did Constantinople get the works?
 That's nobody's business but the Turks'
 'stanbul!!³⁸*

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans was a matter of horror for the Christian West, which feared an ever more aggressive policy of conquest. The Pope made attempts to raise crusading armies to recover the city for Christendom.³⁹ Although, as before, they never resulted in a united front against the Ottomans, they were always a consideration in Sultan Mehmed's policy-making. His success had serious repercussions for the maritime economies of the West. Ottoman control of the Bosphorus drove a wedge through the strategic and trading zone comprised by the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean seas and opened up vast resources to the Ottomans. Like Constantinople before it, Mehmed's new imperial capital needed food and materials to support the flourishing and vital community he envisaged: much of what was needed came from the Black Sea basin.

For the Genoese and Venetian colonies whose economies relied on the Black Sea trade for their survival, the outlook was bleak. The very year after the conquest of Constantinople Mehmed sent a fleet of 56 ships to 'show the flag' in the Black Sea. Failing to take the Genoese fortress of Bilhorod-Dnistrov's'kyi (Cetatea Alba) at the mouth of the Dniester, the Ottoman ships continued to the Crimea where with the support of Haci Giray, Tatar khan of the Crimea, they harassed the Genoese outpost of Caffa; by dint of agreeing to pay an annual tribute, it was able to retain a measure of independence, at least for a while.⁴⁰ Having lost control of a major trade route along which grain, in particular, travelled from the Black Sea basin to feed their city-state, the Venetians were fortunate to have concluded a treaty with Mehmed in the same year. Under its terms they were permitted to trade in Istanbul against payment of customs duty, and also to maintain a colony there.⁴¹

The joint Ottoman-Tatar action against the Genoese was a harbinger of their future close, if often difficult relationship. The Tatar Giray dynasty which ruled Crimea until its conquest by the Russian Empire in the late

eighteenth century had emerged in the fifteenth century by asserting its independence from its overlords, the Tatars of the 'Golden Horde' who controlled the western part of the Mongol Empire created by Genghis Khan, and came to occupy a special place in Ottoman history. The Giray traced their genealogy to Genghis Khan and could thus claim the sort of political legitimacy to which the Ottomans could only aspire: Tatar superiority in the pecking-order of Central Asian dynasties gave them a unique prestige among Muslim states and caused the Ottomans not a little concern.⁴²

During the first decade after the Conquest, Sultan Mehmed focused his attention almost exclusively on the Balkans. His first major campaign after 1453 was against Serbia, the buffer between Ottoman and Hungarian territory and the route by which Hungarian influence could penetrate the Balkans and Hungarian armies threaten his north-western frontier. The conquest of Serbia and its full incorporation into Mehmed's empire took five years. Although the Ottomans captured and briefly held a couple of Serbian fortresses in the Morava valley in 1454, they failed to take Smederevo, the important stronghold guarding the Danubian route east of Belgrade. The objective of the following year's campaign was very different: the Ottoman army moved through the south of Serbia to capture the silver-mining district of Novo Brdo, providing themselves with an essential resource in short supply elsewhere in their territory. In 1456 Mehmed commanded the siege of Belgrade, the fortress whose strategic position at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers made it the key to Hungary: that he failed to take it in a combined land and amphibious operation owed more to its impregnable and strongly-fortified site than to the numerous but motley crusader army which came to its relief. It remained in Hungarian hands until 1522.

John Hunyadi died of plague soon after the siege of Belgrade, but his spirited defence of the castle earned him a legendary place in Hungarian history. A period of turmoil in Hungarian domestic affairs followed his death; his son Matthias Corvinus eventually succeeded to the throne in 1458. George Branković of Serbia had died in December 1456; his son Lazar soon followed him, leaving no male descendant and a power vacuum which invited Hungarian incursion. Serbia had first become an Ottoman vassal state after the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, but while its rulers adopted a cautious policy towards their masters, for many Orthodox notables Ottoman rule was preferable to that of Catholic Hungary.

The leader of the pro-Ottoman faction in Serbia was Michael Angelović, brother of Mehmed's recently-appointed grand vezir, Mahmud Pasha. These brothers belonged to a minor branch of the Serbian despotate; Mahmud Pasha had probably entered Ottoman service very young following

his capture by the Ottomans during the reign of Sultan Mehmed's father, Murad II, in 1427. It is likely that Michael Angelović, who became joint regent of Serbia following Lazar's death, invited Ottoman intervention in Serbia to thwart Hungarian designs, for by spring 1458 Mahmud Pasha was on his way to the fortress of Smederevo. In the meantime, however, the pro-Hungarian faction in Smederevo revolted, and Michael was captured by Lazar's wife Helen (one of his co-regents), imprisoned and sent to Hungary. The defenders of Smederevo refused to surrender and Mahmud Pasha attacked the fortress, capturing the city but not the citadel; he also made a number of other strategic conquests along the Danube. The threat of a Hungarian advance caused Mahmud Pasha to join the Sultan at Skopje in Macedonia whither Mehmed had retired after his Peloponnese campaign earlier in the year, and they checked a Hungarian attack with the help of Mehmed's exhausted troops.⁴³ In 1459 representatives of the pro-Ottoman faction in Smederevo handed the keys of the citadel to Mehmed who ordered its occupation. Thus Serbia finally became an integral part of the Ottoman domains.⁴⁴

The failure of the Ottoman vassal state of Wallachia to send the annual tribute to Istanbul, and subsequent provocative actions of the voyvode Vlad Drakul, 'the Impaler', prompted Mehmed to send Mahmud Pasha across the Danube ahead of him to restore order in 1462. A successful campaign followed and Vlad's more co-operative brother Radul, who had been held hostage in Istanbul as guarantee of Vlad's good behaviour, was confirmed as voyvode in his place. Vlad himself fled to Hungary.⁴⁵

Security from Hungarian incursions could be guaranteed only through full Ottoman control of the Danube-Sava river line which all but bisects the Balkans from the Black Sea in the east to the Adriatic in the west. North-west of Serbia and south of the Sava lay Bosnia, an Ottoman vassal state whose king, Stephen Tomašević, had also refused to send tribute to the Sultan. In 1463 Stephen petitioned for and was granted a fifteen-year truce but almost immediately the Ottoman army set off for Bosnia, entering the country from the south. Stephen fled but Mahmud Pasha caught up with him at Ključ, where he surrendered on the promise that he could go unharmed. Like Serbia, Bosnia became an Ottoman province – although it had to be defended against Hungarian attack the following year – and Mahmud Pasha next seized neighbouring Herzegovina.⁴⁶ The bad faith which had allowed the Ottomans to attack Bosnia despite a truce was again evident when Sultan Mehmed ordered Stephen of Bosnia to be executed; but his captured half-brother Sigismund converted to Islam and, as Kraloğlu ('Son of the King') Ishak Bey, became a companion of the Sultan.⁴⁷ The son of the lord of Herzegovina also converted to Islam, and as Hersekzade

('Son of the Prince') Ahmed Pasha served as grand vezir under both Mehmed's son and heir Bayezid II (whose daughter he married) and his grandson Selim I.⁴⁸

In 1455 the Ottomans had seized Genoese colonies in the Aegean: Old and New Phokaia (Foça) on the Anatolian coast north of Izmir, which controlled rich alum mines whose product was essential to the European cloth trade for its dyeing processes, and Enos (Enez), at the mouth of the Maritsa in Thrace, which derived its revenues from the salt trade. In the same year Athens was captured from its Florentine lord by the marcher-lord Ömer Bey, son of Turahan Pasha. Venetian Naxos and the Genoese islands of Lesbos and Chios agreed to pay tribute to the Sultan in 1458. Following the conquest of Serbia in 1459 Sultan Mehmed returned to Istanbul and then travelled overland to reduce the Genoese colony of Amasris (Amasra) on the Black Sea coast of Anatolia with the aid of a naval force sent from Istanbul. In 1462 Lesbos capitulated to an Ottoman siege while Mehmed was fortifying the Dardanelles to improve the security of Istanbul. He built a pair of fortresses here, at Çanakkale, formerly known as Sultanhisar ('Royal Castle'), on the Anatolian shore, and at Kilitülbahr ('Lock of the Sea') opposite it on the Rumelian shore. With the southern approaches to Istanbul now firmly in Ottoman hands, the city was protected from naval attack.

Even after the loss of Constantinople, a few fragments of the Byzantine Empire survived. These anachronistic entities included the Comnene kingdom of Trebizond which became an Ottoman vassal in 1456, and the despotate of the Morea which was ruled jointly by Thomas and Demetrius Palaeologus, who were rarely able to work together in support of a common cause. Long Ottoman vassals, for three years the Despots failed to pay tribute before Sultan Mehmed's army invaded in 1458. Last-minute payment of this levy failed to divert Mehmed from his purpose, and he marched south. Corinth, on the isthmus, capitulated after a three-month siege, and Ottoman administration was extended to most of the Peloponnese. Despot Thomas tried half-heartedly to recover some of his former possessions but became embroiled in a war with his brother. In 1460 Mehmed himself again led an army which by the end of the year had brought all the Peloponnese, with the exception of the few remaining Venetian colonies, under Ottoman control. Contemporary Greek sources report that Demetrius' daughter Helen entered the female quarters of the Sultan's inner household, his *harem*, as had Tamar, daughter of George Sphrantzes, a chronicler of Mehmed's reign.⁴⁹

Trebizond was the maritime outlet for the trade of Tabriz, capital of Uzun Hasan, the dynamic leader of the Akkoyunlu tribal confederation